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DIME NOVELS



THE BORDER FOES.

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A LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE!

Beadle's Dime Novels, No. 140,

TO ISSUE TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31,

WILL BE

SHEET-ANCHOR TOM;

OR,

The Sunken Treasure.

BY ROGER STARBUCK,

AUTHOR OF "FOUL-WEATHER JACK," "CAST AWAY," "LOST SHIP," ETC.

A romance alive with vigor and sea-spirit; while as a story of "true love" it is delightfully original. We quote:

"A surer hand or foot than Captain Tom's were never known. He had been seen to climb the leach of a slatting-sail in a gale of wind, and to walk a-top of a boom when his craft was plunging bows under. Now, however, chancing to glance toward the quarter-deck, he caught the full glory of Isabel's blue eyes; and such was their power over him, that he lost his balance and tumbled headlong into the sea, marline-spike, ratline stuff and all."

* * * * *

"Let the anchor go, lads, and save the ship; never mind me!"

"The men could not bring themselves to obey such a command. Were they to let the anchor go, Tom, attached to it, must of course be carried with it to the bottom."

"Do you hear there?" repeated the young skipper. "Let the cable run and save the ship, Isabel and—"

* * * * *

"With his shipmates, he now repaired to the cabin, and secured the run hatch with extra fastenings, so as to preclude the possibility of the beach-comers escaping. The imprisoned men howled like enraged tigers when they discovered the trick which had been played them."

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THE BORDER FOES:

OR,

THE PERILS OF A NIGHT.

A ROMANCE OF EARLY KENTUCKY.

BY EDWARD WILLETT,

AUTHOR OF "OLD HONESTY," "HUNTED LIFE," "HIDDEN HOME,"

NEW YORK:

BEADLE AND COMPANY, PUBLISHERS,

118 WILLIAM STREET.

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(No. 139.)

THE BORDER FOES.

CHAPTER I.

DARKNESS AND PRESENTIMENTS.

"We may as well give it up, George," said Walter Wilson, as he looked wistfully ahead into the growing darkness. "Our horses are nearly worn out, and the darkness is coming down upon us like a blanket."

"I am afraid we must," replied George Ryeburn, "though I hate it mightily. It seems so hard, when we have tried our best to finish the journey to-day, to be obliged to stop almost within sight of our homes."

"It is hard, indeed, George, but it must be so, and it is better to submit cheerfully to what can't be helped than to grumble about it. I know that the old folks are looking for me, and I had fully expected to be with them to-night."

"For my part, I was very anxious to reach home to-night, and I would make a strong push for it now, if it were possible to cross the river in the darkness. I can not account for it, Walter, but I have had, during last night and to-day, a strange feeling of anxiety and dread, which has been quite oppressive to me. I have had a strong presentiment that I am needed at home; that something terrible is going to happen; that the family are in danger. I have tried to shake off this feeling, but it clings to me and grows upon me. Do you believe in presentiments, Walter?"

"I must confess that I do, and I am not ashamed of it. While you have such a feeling, I would not rest to-night until I could see you safe at home, if it were possible to get there; but it is entirely out of the question. I had a similar presentiment when my wife was murdered. I was sixty miles from home when I was seized by it, and I rode like a madman, killing my horse, but I reached home just in time to see my cabin in flames, and to take the body of my dear wife out of the fire. I ought to believe in presentiments."

"You made the red-skins pay dearly for the night's work, I have heard."

"I followed them, George, and not one of the party crossed the Ohio again; but that did not settle the account. All the lives in their tribe would not satisfy me for the loss of Mary. I am adding to the account now and then, but it will never be closed while I live."

"It is getting so dark, Walter, that we must select a place to camp. Did you ever know of such darkness before?"

"Never, until last night. It was dark enough then—blackier than a wolf's throat. It seemed to me that I might cut out the chunks of darkness with my knife and carry them."

"I believe this night will be darker, Walter, if that is possible."

"I have no doubt of it. 'There will not be a particle of light from above, and the darkness seems to rise out of the earth like a mist. The air is dull, heavy, and very oppressive. It is likely that we will have a terrible storm before long, for such thick darkness, and such a murky condition of the air, are unnatural, and nature will make a strong effort to rid herself of such incumbrances."

"I would welcome any thing that would dispel this heavy darkness. We can go no further to-night. Where shall we camp, Walter?"

"Near the river, of course. We must have water for our horses. We are on Simon Atlee's land, and I judge we are not far from his house. We might reach it, I suppose, but you would not like to pass the night there."

"No, indeed. I never want to go where I am not entirely welcome, and you may be sure that I would not enter the house of my father's bitterest enemy."

"And yet you love his daughter, if reports are true."

"I do, Walter, and am not ashamed to confess it, for Kate is a splendid girl. She is as good as she is beautiful, and I wish I could marry her, and thus put an end to the trouble between our families. But her father hates every one of the name of Ryeburn, and of course I can have no hope of gaining his consent. I am afraid, Walter—but you won't say any thing about it, will you?"

"You know that I never betray secrets."

"Perhaps it may amount to nothing, and then I would rather not have spoken about it; but I may say what I please to you."

"What is it?"

"I am afraid that Simon Atlee may take advantage of my absence, to try to work out his grudge against father. I believe him to be capable of any thing vile and underhanded, and perhaps my presentiment refers to him. Do you think it possible, Walter?"

"It is possible, certainly. Is this the first time it has occurred to you?"

"I did not think of it before I left home, for I am rather thoughtless, as you know; but it was suggested to me by somebody. I suppose I had better tell you all about it."

"Tell me all, my boy. Your secrets will be safe with me, and I may be able to advise you."

"It will be best to tell you, I have no doubt. When I set out on this journey, Walter, I came across the river to meet you, as you know. As I was passing near Simon Atlee's farm, I was wishing, naturally enough, that I could see Kate, and say good-by to her; but I thought that such a meeting was out of the question, as I had not even been able to let her know that I was going. But, as I reached a corner of Atlee's cornfield, whom do you suppose I saw standing near the fence, and looking down the road by which I was coming?"

"Kate Atlee, of course."

"It was easy enough to guess that, I suppose. She said she had heard that I was going away, and wanted to bid me good-by. We spoke about my trip to the Holston, and she said she was sorry I was going, and wanted to know whether it was not a long and dangerous journey; but she was glad that you were going with me, and said that you were a good man."

"Much obliged to her for the compliment; but that isn't the point, George. I want to know what she said about her father and his intentions."

"That is what I am trying to tell you; but I can't come to the point without telling you how she came to it. She

asked if I was not afraid to leave the family at this season of the year, and I asked whether she was afraid to remain outside of the fort. She admitted that she did feel uneasy about it, and I promised that I would return from the Holston as soon as possible, though I did not think she had any reason to be alarmed. I then asked her when her father expected to move into the fort, and I think I remember all she said about him."

"That is what I want to hear."

" 'It may be many days before he leaves the farm,' she said, 'and that is what I wanted to speak to you about in particular, though I hardly know what to say.'"

" 'I wish I could understand you,' said I."

" 'I am afraid that it is for no good purpose that father intends to stay out here.'"

" 'What do you mean?' I asked."

" 'I wish you could guess,' said Kate. 'I do not like to speak what I think. You know how my father hates your people, and I am afraid that he means to do them some harm while you are gone.'"

" 'Why do you think so?' I asked."

" 'Because he seemed to be very glad when he learned that you were going, and that you expected to be gone so long. He then had a long talk with brother Will, in which I heard your name mentioned, and heard some expressions that made me tremble, although I did not fully understand them. Yesterday brother Will went away, and father told him to hurry back.'"

"Was that all that she said, George?" inquired Wilson.

"That was about all; except that she suspected her father of an intention to do something wrong, and that she hoped I would hasten back."

"What do you think about it?"

"Much as Simon Atlee hates my father, I can hardly believe that he would really commit a crime; but I have thought a great deal of what Kate said, and, although I have tried to throw off the impression she made, it has stuck to me, and it has troubled me greatly."

"I am afraid there may be too much truth in it, George. Your father is bitter and vindictive enough, but he is not

mean and murderous, as Simon Atlee is. I believe that man to be capable of almost any crime. The son is not as bad as the father, I think, but his associations are evil, and he is easily led into wickedness."

"There are some grounds then for my presentiment."

"I think so; but we can neither do any thing nor learn any thing to-night, and must try to be patient until morning. It is likely, too, that Atlee has done all the harm he could, if he really meant to do any, before this time, and that we are too late to prevent it."

"You are a Job's comforter, Walter."

"I want to get at the truth. That is the first thing necessary, in all cases. Come, George; it is getting as dark as a stack of black cats, and we shall find no better camping-place than this. If you will start a fire, I will tether the horses and unpack them. We will talk more about these matters when we get settled for the night."

While we leave these young men engaged in preparing their camp for the night, we will inform the reader, as briefly as possible, who and what they were.

George Ryeburn was the son of a respectable farmer in the neighborhood, who had emigrated from Virginia, and had settled near the head-waters of the Kentucky river. George, the eldest son, was a fine, manly young fellow of twenty-four, and was the chief reliance of his family, his father being pretty well advanced in years. He was not only strong, active and good-looking, but was brave and of a noble disposition, his main fault being that a dash of recklessness was mingled with his bravery.

Walter Wilson was several years older, and was a splendid specimen of the borderer. Young as he was, he had passed through many adventures, and had experienced much suffering—his newly-married wife having fallen a victim to the savages within a short time after he brought her to the settlement. His active and adventurous spirit would have led him to seek relief in other scenes and excitements, but he felt that his duty required him to remain with his aged father and mother, of whom he was the only support.

In person he was fully six feet high, and was finely formed, with regular and handsome features, browned as they were by

exposure to the sun and elements. In disposition he was gentle and quiet, carefully avoiding all difficulties, although his bravery was beyond question. His character was deeply tinged with melancholy, caused by the loss of his wife, and since her murder his hatred of the savages had been so intense, that he never let slip a fair opportunity of slaying one of the detested race.

The winter of 1780 had been unusually severe in Kentucky and the adjacent region of country, and many families found themselves, in the spring, entirely destitute of bread. In fact, for a long time they had lived on nothing but meat, and even that was scarce. George Ryeburn, accompanied by Walter Wilson, had been to the older settlements on the Holston river, for a supply of flour and other necessaries, and they were returning when our story opens, having reached the neighborhood of their homes when they were overtaken by the darkness.

CHAPTER II.

SMELLING AND FEELING.

THE two friends soon had their camp prepared, and a small but brisk fire burning. They then skinned and broiled some squirrels which they had shot during the day, completing their supper with crackers, and washing it down with water from the river. Having finished their meal, they lighted their pipes and sat down by the fire, the warmth of which was quite agreeable, for the night was damp, though not really cold.

The darkness increased, until it became so thick that it could be felt, like that which overspread the land of Egypt for three days. Outside of the small space which was dimly illuminated by the fire, nothing could be seen. The darkness stood up like a wall around it, and the young men felt oppressed, as if they were in a cave from which there was no egress. They could hear nothing except a very slight rippling of the water against its banks, for all beasts, birds and insects

appeared to have been awed into silence by the intense and overwhelming gloom.

George Ryeburn and Walter Wilson were also silent, because the prevailing stillness and the deep darkness oppressed them as it did the brute creation, and because they were occupied with their own thoughts. They smoked their pipes without speaking, looking blankly at the mass of darkness by which they were enveloped.

"This will never do, Walter!" exclaimed George Ryeburn, at last. "You must talk to me, or I believe I will go crazy."

"Just so with me, George. What has kept you silent so long?"

"Why have you not spoken?"

"I don't know. I believe I have hardly been thinking, and it seemed almost impossible for me to move my tongue."

"Let us put some more brush on the fire, and light our pipes again, and try to keep ourselves awake by talking. For my part, I must confess that I am almost afraid to sleep."

"I feel drowsy enough to sleep, but I believe it would be better for both of us to keep awake. I should not like to leave you to watch alone."

"Help me to gather brush, then."

"As for the brush, George, I am not sure that we ought to make a big blaze. There may be Indians about the settlement."

"Why do you think so?"

"I have no particular reason in saying so, except that it is fully late enough in the season, and a good time for them to be here."

"That reason amounts to little. Have you no better reason?"

"If you press me, my boy, I must tell you that I think I can smell the rascals."

"Smell them!"

"Yes!"

"You must be joking."

"I assure you that I don't feel like joking in the midst of this gloom."

"What do you mean, then?"

"I mean that I have a peculiar feeling whenever I am in

the neighborhood of a red-skin. There seems to be a sort of odor in the air, which enables me to detect them."

"If you were speaking of polecats, I might believe you."

"You may laugh as much as you please, but it is true. Whenever there are Indians near me, I can feel it, without hearing or seeing them. I call it smelling, and I think smell some of the rascals to-night."

"Perhaps you may feel them, as you have such an antipathy to them, and I won't laugh at you. But it would be impossible for them to see our fire, Walter, on such a dark night as this."

"I don't know about that. Light always shows best in darkness."

"But this darkness is so thick that it is almost impossible to penetrate it. If you go twenty paces from this fire, you can hardly see it. It will not be likely to call up the Indians."

"There is no telling how near us they may be. I smell them quite plainly."

"I must give way to the opinion of a man with such a wonderful nose."

"You may put some more brush on if you wish to, but not much, and then I will tell you an idea which has just struck me."

"What is it?" asked Ryeburn, as he lighted his pipe, after replenishing the fire.

"It has occurred to me, George," replied Wilson, "that the presentiment of which you were speaking may have referred to some one else than your parents."

"What do you mean now?"

"I mean that some one else, who is dear to you, may be in danger, and may need your help."

"Are you speaking of Kate Atlee?"

"I am. We are near her father's house. In fact, it is not a quarter of a mile from here. I think that there are red-skins in the neighborhood, and you have a presentiment that some one is in danger. If Indians have come up from below, they would be more likely to strike in at Simon Atlee's farm than anywhere else. Put these things together, and you

must admit that it is probable that your presentiment may have referred to Kate Atlee and her family."

"It may be so, Walter. In fact, it is very likely. I have not yet heard their watch-dog howl to-night."

"Nor have I; yet he is always at home, and always howls."

"I thought I heard a bark, a short time after we camped, but since then I have heard nothing. I wish we could get up there and look at the house. We could easily tell whether any thing had happened, for there is always a light in Kate's room at night."

"We can do it, I think. It is terribly dark, but there is a perfectly straight and beaten path which will lead us there. We will have to feel our way, but, if we go slowly and carefully, I think there is no danger of getting lost."

"Let us go. Who knows but we might be in time to save life?"

"Very well. I would like a brush with the red-skins if there really are any about here. Get some logs, George, that will keep the fire until we return, while I see that the horses are safe."

These preparations were soon completed, and the two young men, taking their weapons, left the fire and walked out into the darkness.

They had no idea how dark it really was, until they got away from the blaze. They were literally obliged to feel their way, for one could not see the other if he stood directly in front of him. They continually found themselves pushing out their hands, as if to press their way through the solid gloom, and their mistakes and mishaps caused many a laugh, which served to cheer the toilsome way.

They found the path, however, and then their course, as they supposed, was plainer and easier. It was a narrow way, but straight and well-beaten, leading directly to Simon Atlee's house.

"We must be very quiet now," whispered Wilson, "for we will soon be among the red-skins, if there are any about."

In perfect silence they continued to grope through the darkness, until George Ryeburn, by running against a tree, and feeling leaves and turf under his feet, discovered that he was out of the path.

"Walter!" he whispered, but received no reply.

Stepping forward, he stumbled over something, which he at once knew to be a human form, but he could not judge whether it was alive or not.

"Can it be possible," he thought, "that poor Wilson has already fallen among the savages, and has been slain by them?"

Again he whispered the name of his friend, supposing, of course, that it was his body that he had touched.

Receiving no reply, he bent down to examine the object, when a guttural exclamation at once convinced him that it was alive, and that it was an Indian.

The savage started up and seized him, just as he drew his knife and prepared for defense.

As he was about to strike, he heard a dull, cutting blow, and his antagonist, with a slight cry and a moan, fell back upon the ground.

"Are you hurt, George?" asked the voice of Wilson.

"No. Where are you?"

"Right here by your side. How did you get away from the path?"

"Lost my way, I suppose. How did you happen to come here?"

"I stepped aside to kill this red-skin."

"How did you know he was here?"

"I smelt him. I told you there were some of the rascals in the neighborhood. This is not the only one."

"Of course not. He slept very sound for an Indian. I wonder why he did not stir when I stumbled over him."

"The reason is plain enough. Do you smell nothing?"

"I can't boast of such a nose as you have, but I smell rum, I think."

"That is it. The red-skin was drunk, and Simon Atlee had a good supply of rum. You can draw your own conclusions."

"Good God! I can only conclude that Simon Atlee and his family have been slaughtered by the savages!"

"I am afraid they have been, unless they can have escaped, which seems hardly possible on such a night as this."

"Do you smell any more of the red-skins?"

"Not as plainly as I smelt this one, but I have no doubt

that there are more in the neighborhood. This one had probably wandered away from his party, and was so drunk that he laid down to sleep."

"Is he dead?"

"Dead indeed," replied Wilson, after feeling the body.

"Walter, I must not stop here."

"I have not intended to stop here."

"I must go on to the house, and find out the extent of the calamity."

"That is my purpose."

"Come on, then."

"No; you must follow me; and I advise you to keep hold of my coat, so that you need not get lost again."

Wilson regained the path with some difficulty, and led the way toward Atlee's house, his companion not neglecting to keep close to him, this time.

In a little while they reached a fence, which they climbed, and found themselves in plowed ground.

"This must be the garden," said the guide. "The house, I suppose, lies right before us."

"Yes; about twenty rods from the fence. You had better let me lead the way now, for I have been here at night."

"I presume you have, and I can rely upon your instinct, if not upon your knowledge."

"Do you see any light, Walter?"

"None at all; but it would hardly be visible at this distance, on such a night. Besides, there are trees around the house, which might shut out the view. Lead the way, George."

Ryeburn took the lead, partly feeling his way along the bushes, and partly guided by his instinct. Soon his foot struck against something soft, and he stopped to feel of it.

"Here has been one murder, Walter," said he.

"What is it?"

"Watch, Simon Atlee's dog. They must have killed the poor fellow as soon as he barked, and it is no wonder that we have not heard him howl. I am afraid to enter the house, for it has been ransacked, without doubt, and I am convinced that all have been murdered."

"This must be gone through with, George. We must know

for a certainty what has been the fate of the family. Let me go first, for I know the way well enough now."

"Can you see no light yet, Walter?" anxiously whispered Ryeburn, as they pressed onward through the darkness.

"No; and we will not see any, for here I am, bump up against the house!"

"Then there is no hope. Can you find the door?"

"Here it is, and it is open. Take your knife in your hand, and follow me."

Wilson felt his way into the house, with his companion at his heels. As he gained the threshold, he paused and listened, but all within was as silent as the grave.

With an audible sigh, he went on; but he had hardly entered the room, when his foot slipped, and he fell on the floor.

As his hands touched the planks, they were moistened by something soft and sticky, which he at once recognized as blood. At the same time, his feet struck against a body.

"Don't move yet, George," said he. "Here is one body, already."

"Who is it, Walter? For God's sake, tell me!"

"It is Atlee's negro man, for he has a woolly head. Take your flint and tinder, George, and strike a light, if you can. We must see our way in this place."

Ryeburn soon got some tinder burning, and luckily discovered a candle on a puncheon-table in the room. He lighted it, and hastened to commence searching the house.

"Shut the door," said Wilson, "while I wipe off this disgusting blood. We ought not to show any more light than we are obliged to."

George did so, and then both prosecuted the search; but they found nothing more below. The negro man was unarmed, and had probably been tomahawked and scalped as he arose from his bed, for there were no signs of a struggle.

In the next room they saw nobody; but the closet in which Simon Atlee kept his liquor had been broken open, and there was an empty jug on the floor. It was evident that there had been a drunken orgie in the room, for the furniture was broken and tumbled about, and Wilson picked up some feathers, which had probably formed part of the plume of a

chief; but there was nothing to indicate that a fight had occurred.

"The girls slept up above," said Ryeburn. "Let us look after them."

"The ladder is gone, George."

"It has only been hauled up, I suppose. Perhaps they are safe."

A table and a chair were placed under the trap-door, and Wilson raised himself up into the garret, taking the candle, which was handed to him by his friend.

"The ladder is here," said he, "but there is no one in the room."

"Are you sure? Have you searched well?"

"Yes. There is no one here. The girls have been carried off without doubt. Here is a hatchet, with blood on it, near the door. They have not given up without an effort."

While George Ryeburn stood as if stupefied by this intelligence, Wilson descended from the garret, and again examined the lower room. Under the trap-door he found a little blood, and two fingers that had been chopped from a red-man's hand.

"Here is the work of the hatchet," said he, "but the girls were not able to do any thing more. It is my opinion, George, that Simon Atlee was not at home, for his rifle and powder-horn are gone, and his bed has not been slept in. Besides, he would have made as good a fight as he could. Kate Atlee and her cousin were here, for it was they who hauled the ladder up into the garret, and who used the hatchet. They have been carried off, but it can not be possible that the redskins have taken them far, and we still have the hope of finding them."

As Wilson concluded this opinion, the young men were startled by a loud and shrill yell, which evidently proceeded from the forest through which they had lately passed.

CHAPTER III.

THE DARK NIGHT'S WORK.

KATE ATLEE had not told George Ryeburn the entire truth when she met him on his way to the Holston, for she was ashamed to make known to him the full extent of her suspicions concerning her father's intentions, and was unwilling to trouble his mind too much, as her fears might prove groundless.

She could not shake them off, however, and was greatly afflicted by them. From some expressions, that had been carelessly thrown out by her father, and from the general tenor of his actions and discourse, she had been forced to the conclusion that he had some scheme against the Ryeburns, which he intended to put in operation as soon as her brother should return.

As the days passed, and William did not arrive, and her father grew more and more impatient, she hoped that this trouble would pass over, and prayed that George Ryeburn would return in time to disappoint the scheme, if there really was one.

When William came at last, bringing with him two rough companions; when she heard allusions thrown out concerning the business that they had in hand; and when she was ordered to go up to bed, with her cousin and her little brother, because they had something to talk about that was not to be listened to, she was sure that the time had arrived, that some evil deed was about to be attempted. She felt that she would be powerless to prevent it, but she wished to know what was intended, for it was possible that she might at least be able to warn the Ryeburn family of the danger that awaited them.

"What is the matter, Kate?" asked Martha Garnet, as her cousin set the candle down on a stool.

"The matter? What do you mean?"

"I ask what is the matter with you? You are so very pale, and you tremble, and look so troubled, that I am afraid you are sick."

"I am indeed troubled, Martha, but I do not like to tell you the cause."

"Tell me, my dear cousin! Why should there be any secrets between us? You know that I love you as if you were my sister, and that I am always ready to sympathize with you, and to aid you if I can. I know that you are in affliction, and I think it will relieve you to confide in me."

"We must speak lower, Martha. I would not be overheard for a great deal. Let me lay Benny down on the bed, for he is sleepy. He must sleep with his clothes on."

"Why so?"

"Because I am in trouble, Martha. I am afraid that something is going to happen, and I want to be ready to meet it, if I can."

The boy was placed on the bed, where he fell asleep directly, and then Kate knelt down on the floor, and placed her ear at a chink between the logs.

"What are you doing?" asked her cousin.

"I want to listen."

"To listen?"

"Yes. There's no harm in doing so, as it is for a good purpose. Come and listen with me."

"Why? What is the matter?"

"I am afraid that my father and William mean to do some harm to Jacob Ryeburn or his family, and that Buck Turl and Sim Trotter have been brought here to aid them. In fact, I feel sure that they are intending something of the kind."

"Is it possible? Why do you think so?"

"Be quiet, Martha, and listen with me. Can you hear them?"

"Now and then I can catch a word. I heard uncle Simon say that they must swear."

"Yes; and now he is telling them what they must swear to. It is a terrible oath, but they have not yet said what they are going to do."

Kate continued to listen, with her ear at the chink, and soon heard enough to convince her that her suspicions had been correct. She heard her father say that he intended to take out Jacob Ryeburn and have a settlement with him, and

heard her brother laughingly reply that he could guess what kind of a settlement it would be. She listened a few moments longer, and then arose, and tottered to the bed.

"It is horrible," said Martha, as she supported the nearly fainting form of her cousin. "How can they be so wicked and so cruel? Don't let it trouble you, Kate, for you can do nothing to prevent it."

"Why not? I can go down and tell them that I have heard their plans, and that they must not attempt to carry them out."

"Do not think of such a thing, Kate. It would only make them violent toward you, and it would be useless, for it would not hinder them from carrying out their purposes."

"But I ought to do something. I must make some effort. I know a short cut to Mr. Ryeburn's, and perhaps I can hurry down there and warn the family. It seems hard for a child to act against her father, but it is right that I should try to put a stop to his evil work."

"You can do nothing of the kind, Kate. It is impossible. Do you know how dark it is? You can scarcely see your hand if you put it out of the window, and it is not yet fairly night."

"But the men are going, and I ought to be able to go if they do."

"They are not going by any difficult short cut, and they are taking a lantern. They are starting already. Oh, Kate! they are dressed and painted like Indians, and the sight of them frightens me. This is horrible, indeed!"

Kate stepped to the window and looked out, just in time to see her father and his companions disappear in the darkness.

"I must run down to Mr. Ryeburn's," she said. "I can not let that defenseless family be slaughtered without making an effort to save them. If father and William have made Indians of themselves, it is because they mean to act like Indians."

"You shall not attempt it!" exclaimed Martha. "You shall not stir out of the house, if I am strong enough to hold you. You must be crazy to think of it. It is so dark that you would be lost before you could get out of hearing of the

house. You could not get to the river, and, even if you should happen to reach it, it would be impossible to cross. As for finding your way to Jacob Ryeburn's house, you might as well try to carry this house there on your shoulders."

"You are right," said Kate, after a few moments' thought. "I can do nothing but pray for them. That I can and will do."

She knelt by the side of the bed, and became absorbed in silent prayer, while her cousin continued to look out of the window, vainly endeavoring to pierce the dense darkness with her vision.

Soon Martha started, and spoke to Kate in an excited whisper.

"Some people are coming to the house," she said. "I can hear them stumbling through the garden."

"What?"

"Some people are coming here, I say. There! Watch is barking at them."

The dog barked but once, and then gave utterance to a low howl, as if he was in pain, and nothing more was heard from him.

"They have killed Watch, and are coming on to the house," said Kate, who had hastened to the window. "Martha, they are Indians!"

"Indians!" exclaimed Martha, astounded by the terrible word.

"Yes. I can hear them talking. Keep your head inside."

"Perhaps they are uncle Simon and his friends, who have given up their expedition."

"I am not mistaken, Martha. I should know *their* voices. These are not white men."

"How did they find their way here, if they are Indians?"

"It is probable that they have been hiding somewhere in the neighborhood, waiting for our people to get to sleep."

"What shall we do? What will become of us? They will murder us and take our scalps."

"I am afraid they will, or that they will treat us yet more cruelly. We must put our trust in God, and pray for help. While we live we may hope. Who knows but the wonderful darkness of this night may prove our salvation?"

"Kate, they are right at the house!"

"I hear them. They have found the door, but that may stop them for a few moments, as it is locked."

In fact, the girls heard the noise of tomahawks, battering against one of the doors, and the next instant it fell in with a crash.

There was a scream, followed by the dull and sickening sound of a crushing blow, and the fall of a body on the lower floor.

Kate Atlee started up, her face as pale as death, but her eyes flashing, and her lips compressed, as if she was full of courage and determination.

"They have murdered old Nero," she said, "and they will be in father's room in a few minutes. Come on, Martha, and help me pull up the ladder."

Martha cowered by the window, trembling and hiding her face in her hands, for the death of the negro had terrified her.

"Come on!" again exclaimed Kate. "We must not be fearful women now, but must act like strong and brave men. We have a chance for life, but we have not a moment to lose. Remember that we are not responsible for our own lives alone, but for the life of little Benny. Be quick, Martha!"

Thus adjured, the frightened girl hastened to her cousin, and both seized the ladder. It was very heavy and unhandy, but their desperate condition inspired them with superhuman strength, and they pulled and tugged at it until they lifted it into the garret.

They had just drawn it up, when the door of Simon Atlee's room was burst open, and the Indians poured in. The exhausted girls sunk on the floor, and clasped their hands in prayer.

The savages shuffled about the room, and talked in their own language for a few moments, and then the sound of steel striking on flint was heard. Directly, a yellow gleam showed that they had succeeded in producing fire.

"They have got a light, and they will soon find us now," said Kate.

"What shall we do? I wish I had a gun."

"I am glad to see you so brave. We must be cool now,

whatever happens. Here is a hatchet, and I will defend the passage as long as I can."

As the girls listened attentively, keeping their bodies away from the trap-door, they perceived that some article of furniture was dragged under it, and then one of the Indians took hold of the edges of the logs near them, as if for the purpose of drawing himself up into the garret.

As quick as thought, Kate's hatchet came down upon the hard, chopping off two of its fingers. With a yell, the savage dropped back, amid the laughter of his companions.

The attempt was not immediately renewed, for the Indians had found a new object of pursuit, which was very attractive to all of them. The breaking of a closet was heard, followed by joyful cries and eager exclamations, and shortly the fumes of liquor began to ascend into the garret.

"They have found father's rum," said Kate, "and I am glad of it."

"Why are you glad of it, Kate? It will make them wild, and God only knows how they will treat us then."

"They will treat us like demons, if they can get hold of us, but the liquor may save us. They will do nothing but drink, as long as it lasts. If there is enough to make them all drunk, perhaps we may be able to escape."

"How is that possible?"

"I think I know a way. Let us listen to them now."

As Kate had expected, the savages at once commenced a carousal. The fiery liquor mounted to their heads immediately, and they committed all sorts of extravagances. The first taste of the rum begot a furious desire for more, and they continued to drink until every drop was exhausted. Some of them, who were quite intoxicated, rolled on the floor, and others engaged in a rough-and-tumble scuffle. The affrighted girls in the garret might well have imagined that a party of demons were holding an orgie beneath them.

"Now is our time!" whispered Kate, as she started up. "I verily believe that the rum and the darkness will prove our salvation. Can you take the hatchet, cousin, and guard the passage for a little while?"

"Yes," bravely answered Martha. "I will be sure to kill one of them, if they again try to come up."

Kate then stepped to the bed and awakened her brother by shaking him and calling his name. He started up and asked what was the matter.

"Indians!" whispered Kate, putting her hand to his mouth to silence him if he should cry out.

But he did not scream, for it was not the first time that the little fellow had been awakened by a similar alarm. He at once arose, and silently stood ready to be disposed of as his sister should decide.

She stripped the stout homespun sheets from the bed, tied them together, and fastened one end to a log near the window.

"This is our only chance to escape, Martha," she said. "Will you go first, or shall I?"

"I will go first, and you can let Benny down to me," answered her cousin, who was now as calm and collected as if she was attending to her ordinary household duties.

Martha got out of the window, with the assistance of her cousin, and quietly let herself down to the ground. Kate drew up the sheets, tied the end under Benny's arms, and lowered him to Martha. Then, after taking the precaution to put in her pocket the flint and steel, and the remnant of her candle, she also descended, and stood by her cousin and her brother.

The uproar in the lower part of the house had been continually increasing, so that the slight noise made by the girls in effecting their escape was not noticed by the savages.

"So far safe!" whispered Martha. "What shall we do now?"

"Give me the boy, and I will carry him as far as I can. Take hold of my dress, Martha, so that we may not be separated. We must strike out into the woods, and trust to Providence to take care of us. It will be hard for the Indians to find us, in this darkness, if we can get into the forest."

So saying, Kate took Benny in her arms, passed around the corner of the house, and walked directly away from it, knowing that any course she could take would soon bring her to the shelter of the thick woods.

She crossed the corner of the garden, not turning out for the bushes or the fences, but holding as straight a course as

she could, for she was fearful that any deviation from that line might cause her to travel in a circle, and thus bring her back to the house. The girls made slow progress, for it was very difficult to walk through the thick darkness, and they were continually stumbling or running against some obstructions, and scratching and bruising themselves; but they safely reached the forest, where Kate kneeled down, and audibly thanked God for their escape from the murderous savages.

"You must take sister's hand now, Benny, and must walk as well as you can, for you are too heavy to be carried," she said, when she arose from her knees.

As she spoke, a yell of disappointment and fury was heard from the house. The Indians had evidently ascended into the garret, and had discovered that they had lost their prey.

Startled by this fearful sound, Martha commenced to run, but was seized and detained by her cousin.

"Keep cool!" said Kate. "The Indians will try to pursue us, I suppose, but it is not likely that they can follow us in the darkness. If we hurry, we will be as likely as not to run toward them."

Kate again took the lead, holding Benny by the hand, and pressed on through the close forest and the dense night, with Martha behind her and holding her dress.

CHAPTER IV.

BESIEGED.

"How dark it is to-night!" said Mrs. Ryeburn, as she was seated in her room, occupied with her knitting.

"Dark!" exclaimed her husband, who was standing at the open door. "That is no name for it. It is as black as the mouth of the pit—as black as Simon Atlee's heart. I never saw the like before, and I have had some experience of dark nights."

"Do you think it is darker than last night, Jacob?"

"Yes, indeed. I thought it couldn't be possible that thicker

darkness would ever settle down upon the earth, than we had last night, but this beats it. I believe we might fill bags with this darkness, and make night at noonday by letting it out."

"You ought not to speak in that way, Jacob. This is one of God's providences, but it is a strange one, I admit. I am afraid that something dreadful is going to happen."

"If you don't believe me, Mary, come and look at it. You can't see the oak tree by the side of the house. Neither man nor beast can venture abroad on such a night as this, and there is not a sound to be heard out-doors."

Alice sighed audibly.

"What is the matter, my girl?" asked her father. "Are you sighing because Captain Hood can't come to visit you as he promised to? You may as well give him up, for you will not see him to-night."

"I am not expecting him, father," evasively replied Alice.

"I suppose Alice is troubled as I am, because it is impossible for her brother to return to-night," suggested Mrs. Ryeburn.

"You are right, wife; he will not attempt to travel in this darkness, wherever he is. If he was within a mile of home, he would be obliged to stay there until morning."

"I am sorry. I had fully expected to see him to-night."

"He has only been gone ten days. It is time that he was getting back, to be sure, if he has had good luck; but you have no reason to feel uneasy about him. To-morrow or next day we will see him if nothing out of the way has happened."

"I want brother to come and bring me some bread," moaned little Maggie, the sick child, who had dwindled away almost to a skeleton, during a long illness.

"Yes, dear," said the mother. "Brother will soon be home, and you shall have all you want. I hope, Jacob, that you will remember your promise when George returns."

"What promise?"

"Have you already forgotten it? You have promised to move to the fort as soon as he comes back."

"I remember that, of course, and will keep my promise. I always keep my promises, Mary. I ought to remember this

one, I am sure, for I have scarcely heard any thing else from your lips during the past week."

"I have not meant to let you forget it, certainly. It has seemed so important to me, for our own sakes, as well as for the safety of our children, that we should leave the farm and go to a place of security, that the thought has hardly been out of my mind. Neither Alice nor I will be able to sleep in peace until George returns and we get the family into the fort."

"We will move, Mary, as soon as the boy comes, and it is useless to say any thing more about it. But you and Alice are entirely too fearful, too fond of borrowing trouble and imagining evil. When George left you were in a hurry to get away, and were sure that we would not be safe here another day. But ten days have passed, and nothing has occurred to alarm us. We are in no more danger now, as far as I can see, than we have been; but you shall move, as soon as George comes."

"There is always danger at this time of the year," persisted Mrs. Ryeburn.

"Pshaw! This night, at least, I hope you will dismiss your fears, and be quiet on the subject, for no Indians could find the house before morning, if they had been here fifty times. Nothing can move in this darkness."

As a strange commentary upon these confident words, the breaking of a dry branch was heard in the near forest, followed by a sound like the falling of a human body.

"What is that, father?" asked Alice, who had gone to the door and was looking out at the night.

"I don't know, Alice. Nothing of any consequence I suppose."

"It is plain that something has been moving."

"Some of the cattle or hogs, perhaps."

"I thought I heard a voice."

"Nonsense, child! You are thinking of Captain Hood; as if it was possible that he would try to come here on such a night as this."

"I was not looking for him; but I am quite sure that I heard a voice. See, father! there is a light!"

Jacob Ryeburn looked in the direction that his daughter

pointed out, and saw a faint gleam, which was at first stationary, and then was seen to move.

"You are right, Alice," he said. "There is a light, and it seems to be coming in this direction. I wonder what it can mean?"

Alice uttered a slight shriek, and started back from the door.

"It is an Indian!" she exclaimed. "Shut the door, father!"

Jacob Ryeburn had seen the same object which had excited the terror of his daughter. The light being suddenly raised, had flared, and he had caught a glimpse of the paint and feathers of a red-man, who was holding it. It was only a slight glimpse, through the foliage, but it was sufficient to convince him that there was one Indian in the forest, if not more. He immediately shut and bolted the door, directing his wife to hasten to close the back entrance. Hardly had this been done, when a rush that caused the house to tremble was made against the front door.

Jacob Ryeburn's house was built in nearly the same manner as that of Simon Atlee. The principal points of difference between them were, that the doors of Ryeburn's house were very thick and strong, and that there was no log partition on the lower floor—the place that was occupied by the negro man and woman being separated from the rest of the apartment by a sort of curtain of blankets.

In the front room, if it may be so called, were two windows, on opposite sides of the house, each about two feet square, unglazed, and provided with stout shutters. In the back part was one smaller opening, without a shutter. The doors were fastened by stout wooden bars, and were capable of resisting any ordinary attack. The greater part of one side of the front room was taken up by a broad and deep fireplace, with jambs and back of stone. The garret, in which Mrs. Ryeburn slept, with Alice and Maggie, was reached by means of a ladder.

As soon as Mr. Ryeburn had discovered the character of his visitors, and had attended to the fastening of the doors and windows, he called to the negro man, who had already come in to see what was the matter, and took down his rifle

from its legs. Tom, the negro man, who was a stout and resolute fellow, was similarly armed, and the two men coolly prepared to defend themselves and the family.

Mrs. Ryeburn and Hannah armed themselves with axes, Alice seized a hatchet, and little Sammy flourished a dilapidated pistol, which he had used as a plaything.

"Keep cool, all of you!" said the old man. "It is not likely that the red-skins can get in at the doors or windows, and I hope we can keep them off until daylight. If we can, we will have a fair chance at them then."

"Unless they burn the house down before that time," suggested his wife.

"If they set fire to the house, may God help us! We can only do our best, but that much we will do. Tom, do you watch the back door and the little window, while I look after this room."

After being repulsed from the front door, the assailants tried the back door and the windows, but found them all securely fastened. They were then heard bustling about near the front door, and Jacob Ryeburn, who was listening there, said that they intended to try to break in the door.

The attempt was soon made, a rush was heard, and a heavy blow was struck upon the door, as if a rail or some other piece of timber was driven against it; but the stout oak showed no signs of splitting, nor were the ponderous bars shaken in their fastenings.

"Those fellows act queerly for red-skins," said the old man. "They neither yell nor jabber. They have neither tried to cut down the house with their hatchets, nor to scare us to death with their screeching. I never knew the dogs to go to work so quietly."

The attempt was renewed again and again, but without effecting the object, and then Mr. Ryeburn resolved that he would try to put a stop to that mode of attack.

Directing the negro man to stand near him with his rifle, he listened attentively until he knew that the rail was being carried back for another rush. Then the door was suddenly thrown open, and he and Tom fired out into the darkness, aiming at the light which the attacking party carried. Having delivered their fire, they closed and barred the door

immediately. A smothered curse was heard from the assailants as they retreated, followed by a few harmless shots.

"You have put out their light, father!" exclaimed Alice, who was looking through a hole in the side of the house. "It was a lantern, I am sure, and it was struck by one of the bullets."

"I am sorry to hear it, for the light was a good thing to aim by. One of them must have been hit, for I heard him curse, and he swore exactly like a white man. They had a lantern, too, and I wonder where they got it, for the red-skins never carry lanterns."

"Perhaps they stole it from some other house," suggested Mrs. Ryeburn.

"Perhaps they did and perhaps they didn't. If they had made an attack upon any other farm, it is likely that we would have heard of it. There is something strange about this, Mary. Those Indians—if they are Indians—have learned to swear in very good English."

"It is the first part of our language that they learn, I suppose. Do you think it possible that they are not Indians? If they are not, what can they be?"

"If they are not red-skins, wife, it is plain that they must be white men."

"But you and Alice saw them, and you said that they were Indians."

"They seemed to be Indians, sure enough; but it is easy for white men to disguise themselves like red-skins, and it comes natural for some white men to act like red-skins."

"Who can they be? What white men would do such a thing?"

"Simon Atlee would be mean enough to do it, as you well know."

"But he is only one man."

"He has a son, Mary, who is as much like him as an imp can be like satan. Will Atlee is a wild and lawless character, and his companions are known to be the worst kind of men, just such as old Simon would like to have with him, if he wanted to commit some villainous act."

"It may be as you suspect, Jacob, and I am afraid it is. It is a terrible thing for white men to turn against each other,

as if they could not find enemies enough among the Indians."

The next attempt of the assailants was made against the back door. It was not so stout or so well fastened as that at the front of the house, and it was evident that they had obtained a heavier piece of timber for a battering-ram; for the first blow made the door quiver and the building tremble. At the next stroke, splinters flew from the wood, and one of the bars cracked.

Alice shrieked, and her mother turned pale. Jacob Ryeburn seized his rifle, and stood in front of the door with Tom, prepared to defend the entrance.

"Wait a minute, mars'r," said Hannah. "Dar's plenty post-logs jest outside de front door, and Tom and I kin git 'em and pile 'em up here, w'ile de Injuns is 'round on dis side ob de house."

The suggestion of the negress was a good one, and was immediately acted upon. The front door was partially opened, and, after seeing that no one was near, Tom stepped outside and handed in the posts to Hannah and the white women, who took them into the other apartment, and piled them up with their ends against the weakened door. Mr. Ryeburn, in the mean time, stood at the entrance with his rifle, ready to shoot down the first man who should make his appearance.

This operation was attended with considerable risk, as those outside might be expected, if they should discover the door to be open, to make a rush to enter; but it was entirely successful. The heavy posts were piled up in the house, until they reached nearly to the top of the back door, forming a barrier which destroyed the effect of the battering-ram. The front door was then closed and fastened, and the assailants, probably conjecturing what had been done, discontinued their efforts for a while.

"Thanks to Hannah, that plan is foiled," said Mr. Ryeburn. "The next thing for them to try, I suppose, is the windows. They don't work like red-skins; but, whatever they are, they will find it no easy matter to get into this house."

"I am only afraid," remarked his wife, "that they will try to burn it down."

"It is very likely that they will be driven to that course,

when all their other plans fail. If they set fire to the house, we must call upon God to help us, for we shall not be able to help ourselves."

"I have an idea, father," said Alice, in an eager voice.

"What sort of an idea, my child?"

"One that will save us, if you will let me put it in practice."

"Let us hear it."

"It is a very simple one. Let me slip out and go to the fort, where I will inform Captain Hood of your danger, and he will immediately send you assistance."

"Impracticable!" exclaimed Mrs. Ryeburn.

"You talk like a crazy person," said the old man. "How could you get to the fort on such a dark night as this?"

"It does not seem impossible to me, father. I know the way to the fort so very well, that I have often thought I could follow it blindfolded. It is very dark, but the darkness would shield me from the Indians, and I can take a lantern, which I can conceal until I am a safe distance from the house."

"It is out of the question. I would not even send Tom on such an errand," replied Jacob Ryeburn.

"It is entirely too perilous. You must not think of such a thing. It is almost certain death," added his wife.

Alice persisted in endeavoring to obtain permission to undertake the adventure which she had proposed, but the denials of her parents were so positive, that she was obliged to cease her importunities.

When this question was settled, the family were alarmed by a cry from Hannah, and Mr. Ryeburn rushed into the back apartment, accompanied by his wife and Tom.

When asked the reason of her outcry, the negress declared that she had seen the head of an Indian at the little window, but it had disappeared as soon as she screamed.

Although he did not really apprehend any danger from this opening, the old man proceeded to close it, and he soon had it effectually barricaded.

He then returned to the other room, where, to his great astonishment, he was informed by his wife that Alice could not be found.

"What can have become of her!" he exclaimed, after he

had searched the apartment. "Sammy, have you seen your sister?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy. "She stepped out of doors a little while ago. She told me to put up the bars, but said that she would be back in a few minutes."

After waiting a short time, in the hope that she would return, the anxious parents were forced to conclude that she had gone out with the purpose of endeavoring to make her way to the fort. As it was useless to attempt to follow her, they mentally consigned her to the care of Providence, and gave their attention to matters pertaining to their own safety.

CHAPTER V.

THE BESIEGERS.

SIMON ATLEE and his companions worked their course through the forest without much difficulty. They were not better able to see their way after dark than other people, but they kept to the road, and they carried a lantern, by which means they were enabled to make pretty good progress. The darkness troubled them somewhat, however, enough to draw forth from them some broad oaths and savage exclamations, when they chanced to stumble, or to stray from the path.

Crossing the river caused them a little delay, although the ford was an easy one, and they could not travel quite so rapidly after they left the road and struck into the forest-path; but it was not ten o'clock when they came in sight of Jacob Ryeburn's house, or would have been in sight of it if the darkness of the night had permitted them to see it.

"I know where we are now, boys," said Simon Atlee, as he called a halt. "The house is just beyond us, only a few rods ahead, and you might see it if it was daylight."

"What are your plans, father?" asked Will. "What are you going to do? How do you mean to get at them?"

"No plans are needed, my boy. The thing is simple enough. The front door is open, for I can see a light shining through

it. We must get as near to it as we can, and then rush in and surprise them. We had better follow around the edge of this piece of woods, for it will bring us close up to the house. Before we go any further, we had better take something to steady our nerves, and I have got some good old rum here, such as seldom finds its way to these parts."

This proposition met with enthusiastic acceptance, and the old man produced a large-sized "tickler," which was passed around and duly honored. Then he led the way through the forest, skirting the cleared ground, until they were within about thirty yards of the house.

The door was open, as Simon Atlee had said, and Jacob Ryeburn could be seen standing there in the light, together with his daughter Alice.

"Jerusalem! What a purty gal!" exclaimed Buck Turl. "Is that old chap the man you are arter, mister? I ken draw a bead on him mighty easy from here, and ken lay him out without hurtin' the gal."

"Hold your tongue, and don't think of such a thing!" said Atlee. "Didn't I tell you that I ain't wanting to kill him, but to take him out and have a settlement with him?"

"Come on, then!" impatiently exclaimed Will. "Can't you do a job like this without making so much fuss about it? If you hold the lantern so high, father, they will see us."

"I only want to see my way clear when I start. Follow me, boys, and we will jump on them before they know it."

The conspirators started toward the house, but, at that instant, the door was shut, and Atlee muttered an oath as he perceived that they had been discovered. He hastened his steps, and told his followers to hurry, hoping to reach the door before it could be barred. But his speed was in vain, and his companions only dashed themselves uselessly against the stout oak.

"Follow me around to the other door," exclaimed the old man. "I reckon we can catch them there."

But that attempt was as vain as the other, for Jacob Ryeburn held the "interior line," and had put up the last bar, just as they reached the door. They then tried the windows, but found them, also, securely fastened.

"What are you going to do now, father?" inquired Will, as the assailants retired to consult.

"I reckon we shall have to lay siege to his confounded old castle. How cussed unlucky it was, that they should have caught sight of us, just as we were ready to take them! We are going to have more trouble with this job than I thought for."

"It is all your fault, father. You started in without a plan, and you were bound to show the light, when I told you not to."

"I don't see any sense in talkin' about bein' bothered," remarked Sim Trotter. "Why in thunder don't you go to work and bu'st in the door? It must be a powerful stout piece of wood that we can't split, with Buck Turl at the head. Thar's plenty of rails about here, and we had better be at work, if we mean business."

As this was the most feasible suggestion that was offered, the assailants selected the heaviest rail that they could find, and Turl and Trotter and Will bore it against the door, while the old man held the light.

Three or four times the rail was thrust forward, without making any impression upon the tough oak. It was carried back for a last effort, when the door of the house was thrown open, and two shots were fired from it.

"Curse the luck! they have hit me," exclaimed Simon Atlee, clapping his hand on his leg.

"They have ruined our light, too," said Will, as he picked up the lantern, which had been shattered by a bullet.

The rail was dropped, and the assailants retreated to the cover of the woods, where all but Sim Trotter fired their rifles spitefully at the house.

"Who would have thought the sneakin' cusses would have done such a trick as that?" exclaimed the old man.

"Who wouldn't?" rejoined Trotter. "It is just the trick that I would have been up to, as sure as eggs is eggs. The only wonder is that they don't rush out and kill us, now that you have thrown away your bullets on the solid logs. I reckon they would, if it wasn't so dark."

"Are you hurt much, father?" asked Will.

"How can I tell, boy, when it is as dark as a stack of

black cats? I know I am hit, and that's all I know about it."

"Strike a light, Buck, and let us see what is the matter with the old man."

A light blaze was started by means of flint and steel, and it was ascertained that Atlee had only received a slight flesh wound, which it was hardly considered worth while to bandage.

The injury to the lantern appeared to the conspirators to be a much more serious matter, but Will Atlee succeeded in rudely repairing it, so that it would give a faint and partial light when it was carefully carried.

"I declare to goodness!" solemnly exclaimed the old man, "I hadn't thought of hurting Jake Ryeburn and his folks; but, after they have acted in such a treacherous and underhanded manner, I don't feel like showing them any mercy. Jake Ryeburn and his nigger have got to die, anyhow."

"That's the way to talk, father," said Will. "When you are going to do a job of this kind, there ought to be no half-way business about it."

Led by the old man, the conspirators went around to the rear of the house, where they found a long post-oak beam, which they declared to be the very thing for their purpose. Simon Atlee stationed himself with his rifle, so as to cover his companions, if another attempt should be made to drive them off, and Buck Turl and the others seized the beam, which they proceeded to use as a battering-ram.

It was soon evident that the back door had not, by any means, the strength and tenacity of the front door, and that the post-oak was a much more efficient instrument than the rail, for, at every blow of the new battering-ram, the door shook, and the wood groaned, cracked and split.

"Give it to her, boys!" shouted the old man, as he heard the cracking and splitting. "A few more such blows will drive in that door, and then we will have them just where we want them."

But the young men were obliged to stop and rest, as the beam was a very heavy one. When they resumed the work, they discovered, to their great surprise, that the door seemed to be more solid as the battering-ram struck it, and that it did

not yield to their blows as formerly. In a few minutes, in fact, the stout beam had no more effect upon the planks than it would have upon a pile of logs, and the besiegers set it down again, convinced that they could not force in the door, however they might split and break it.

"What is the matter now, boys?" angrily inquired the old man. "Why don't you keep on?"

"'Cause thar ain't any use in keepin' on," answered Sim Trotter. "The folks inside have piled some logs up ag'inst the door, cap'n, and have made it as solid as a hickory butt."

"Where in thunder did they get the logs?"

"Wal, they didn't have to go fur to find 'em. I saw a pile of oak posts nigh the door, on the t'other side of the house and I reckon they have been totin' them in, while we have been poundin' away here."

"The old fox is mighty smart, but it will be all the worse for him when we do get him out of his hole. We ought to have watched them, and shot them down when they were getting the posts."

"We couldn't be on both sides at once, very handy."

"That's a fact. What is the best thing to do now?"

"Thar's one sure way of gettin' at 'em," suggested Buck Turl. "If I hated the varmints as much as you do, cap'n, I would jist set fire to the crib and smoke 'em out."

"No, no, Mr. Turl!" replied the old man. "That may do for red-skins, but not for a man who has white blood in him. There are two women and a sick girl in there, besides the nigger wench. Can't you think of something else?"

"I reckon I ken," drawled Sim Trotter. "Thar's a hole in this end of the house, that was left thar fur a windy, I reckon."

"What of that?" asked Will. "Even if a man could squeeze through that little hole, they would kill him as soon as he showed his head."

"I don't allow to try to squeeze in, boy, but I mean to have a look at the inside of the house. Thar's no tellin' what I mought happen to see."

The long man placed a rail against the side of the house climbed up it, and looked in at the opening. He remained

there about two minutes, when a screech was heard, and he dropped down and rejoined his companions.

"What is the matter? What did you see?" asked the old man.

"Thar ain't nothin' the matter to speak of. While I was lookin' about, a nigger gal sot eyes on me, and gave a yell that brought the others arter me, and I thought it was time to scoot. As fur seein', I saw the old man and woman, and the two niggers, and that cussed pile of posts. I noticed suthin' else, too."

"What was that, Sim?" inquired Will.

"Suthin' that will let us into this crib, I reckon. Anyhow, if we do git in, I reckon that'll be the way."

"What way? What are you speaking about?"

"The way to git in thar. We mought have noticed it from the outside, if we had had our eyes open and our vits about us."

"What do you mean? Out with it, and don't stand there talking like a fool."

"I tell you, boys, thar's a most onmerciful big chimbley-place in that house."

"Nothing strange about that, Sim. There is a big chimney, too, but I reckon you don't mean to try to go down it. They could pick us off, one by one."

"In course they could; but what do you say to goin' through it?"

"Explain yourself, and quit wasting time," said the old man.

"It's a powerful big chimbley-place, as I said, and they've got suthin' in front of it, to shut it up and make it look purty, when they ain't usin' it. The back is made of stuns, but it's a stick-and-plaster chimbley, and it ought to be easy enough fur us to dig through from the outside, and get in thar unbeknownst to 'em."

"That's the idee!" exclaimed the old man. "We've got our knives and hatchets to work with, and we ought to go through that chimney pretty quick. Then we'll have 'em, like rats in a trap. But we must be mighty quiet about it, so as not to give them a hint of what is going on."

The three young men then set to work, by the dim light of

the broken lantern, which was held for them by Simon Atlee. They soon came to the conclusion that it would be easier, as well as more thorough, to pull down all the bottom part of the chimney, and to prop up the rest, so that the stack should not fall down upon them.

In pursuance of this design, Buck Turl took his hatchet, and went to the woods to procure some props.

As his eyes were useless in the thick darkness, he was obliged to feel of the saplings in order to select such as were fit for his purpose. While he was thus engaged, his hand came in contact with a mass of feathers, and the shaven crown of some human being.

"Is this you, Sim? What are you doin' out here?" he asked.

He was answered by a guttural exclamation in the Indian tongue, and knew at once that it was a savage that rose up before him.

"Mingo, by jingo!" he muttered, as he plunged his knife without a moment's hesitation, in the breast of the red-man, who gave a slight cry, and sunk to the ground.

Turl secured the scalp, picked up the props that he had found, and hastened back to his comrades, to whom he related the occurrence, assuring them that the forest was full of Indians, and showing the bloody trophy in confirmation of his words.

"Put out that light, father," said Will Atlee. "I have no doubt that Buck is right, and it won't do to show the red-skins the least glimmer. Perhaps they won't be able to find us in the darkness."

Hardly had the light been extinguished, when there arose a wild and furious howl in the woods, such as could only have proceeded from the throats of savages. The Indians had found the body of the man who had been killed by Turl, and were wondering how he had come to his death.

The besiegers found themselves besieged, and the contest had become a three-sided one.

"I'll tell you what I mean to do," said Sim Trotter. "I am goin' to knock at the door of this house, and tell the folks that I am chased by Injins. They heerd the yell just now

no doubt, and they'll know by my voice that I'm a white man, and I reckon they will let me in."

"You talk like a coward, Sim Trotter," said Will. "Wait till the red-skins find us, before you get scared. A little more digging will let us into the house without asking anybody. Your voice may do well enough, but your paint and feathers will never pass you off for a white man."

"I reckon we may as well try it," said the old man. "We can stand around there ready, and can jump in with Trotter, if they open the door. If we don't succeed, we can come back and work at the chimney."

This was agreed to, and Sim Trotter, followed by the others, went to the front door, and knocked.

CHAPTER VI.

LOST IN THE FOREST.

KATE ATLEE and her cousin continued to stumble and toil through the dark forest, until they were so weary that they sat down to rest awhile.

The shouts and yells of the Indians could be heard occasionally in the distance, but the girls knew that their enemies, although they might attempt to pursue them, would not be able to find them, unless by the merest chance.

"I believe we are as safe here as if we were a thousand miles away," said Kate.

"I hope we are," answered Martha, "but I can hear the savages. They are very angry, no doubt, and will try their best to catch us."

"Let them do so. I am not afraid of them now. God has protected us, Martha, and we ought to be very thankful for our preservation. We should not abuse His goodness by refusing to trust him now. I hardly think they will try to search for us in the darkness, and if they should, there is not the remotest chance that they will catch us."

"That sounds reasonable enough, Kate, but I must confess

that I am afraid of them, although the confession may prove me guilty of ingratitude to Providence. God helps those who help themselves, and I feel as if we would be safer if we were further away from the savages."

"Perhaps so, but we all need rest now, for you and I are tired out, and Benny has already fallen asleep on my lap. In a little while we will start, if you wish, but I think it will puzzle you to say where we are to go to."

"We can do nothing but go straight ahead, I suppose, as we have been going. I shall be satisfied to take any direction that will lead us away from the house."

"That will be easy enough, I think, for I judge that we have come nearly in a straight line, so far, and when I sat down here, I was careful to keep my face turned in the same direction."

The yells and shouts of the savages, which the girls had heard in the direction of the house, gradually died away, and all around them was silence and darkness. The darkness was so deep, and the silence was so intense, that both silence and darkness were like a weight upon the breasts of the fugitives, hindering their breathing, and oppressing them with a sense of indefinable fear.

"I declare, Kate, I must speak," said Martha, after sitting a while without uttering a word. "I must say something, and somebody must answer me, or I am afraid I shall go crazy."

"Say what you please, cousin. I suppose you can do so without talking very loud."

"I don't mean to raise the neighborhood and bring the savages on us, I assure you. Do you think the danger is over?"

"By no means. I think we are in danger as long as we are in this neighborhood, but I believe that the immediate danger has passed. The Indians were yelling and whooping madly enough a while ago, but all is still now, and I hope they have given up the chase."

"Perhaps they are always quiet when they are hunting for people. Do you think, Kate, that they can see in the dark, and that they can follow a trail by the smell, as a dog can?"

"I have heard that they can see in the dark better than

white men can, and that they are also much better at following a trail."

"Perhaps they are silently looking for us now, and at any moment they may come across us and kill us."

"I hope not. I hope that father's rum will be our salvation here, as it aided us to make our escape from the house. However sharp their eyes may be, it is not likely that they will be able to follow us in this darkness, even if they are sober enough to use their senses. They will be more ready to sleep off their drunken fit, than to go stumbling about in the forest."

"If that is so, I will be very thankful, for I have been frightened enough already. But it seems to me, Kate, that we are still too near the house, and that we had better go further if we can."

"I am willing to go now, for we have rested enough. Benny is so sound asleep that I don't like to wake him, and I must carry him in my arms."

"Let me take him, Kate."

"No; I will carry him as long as I can, and will give him to you when I get tired."

"Are you sure that you can lead us away from the house?" asked Martha, as they rose.

"I am certain of it. You had better take hold of my dress, cousin, so that we may keep together. We might easily get separated and lose each other, in this thick darkness."

On they went, stumbling against stones and stumps, pushing through briars and bushes, and running against trees, for the night was so black that they could not see a step of the way before them. This rough style of traveling soon woke up little Benny. Kate succeeded in quieting him when he cried, but he was so restless, and jumped and twisted about in her arms so much, that she was glad to transfer her burden to Martha.

They had gone but a little way further, when Martha also became weary, and it was agreed that they must stop and rest for a while.

Accordingly, they sat down again, in the midst of the forest, surrounded by the thick darkness, which seemed to hem them in like a wall of stone.

As soon as they were quiet, Benny dropped asleep in Martha's lap, and both girls were silent, absorbed in their own thoughts.

Their reverie was destined to be interrupted in a manner that was pleasing to neither, and quite painful to one of them.

As Kate moved her head, her hat fell off among the bushes, and she commenced to grope around upon the ground to find it. While she was thus engaged, her right hand came in contact with something round, smooth and warm, which she felt was the shaven head of a human being.

Before she could withdraw her hand, her fingers touched a lock of coarse hair, and she knew that she was within reach of a sleeping Indian!

A cold shudder passed over her, and for a moment her heart ceased to beat. She felt a choking sensation in her throat, followed by a faintness which so overpowered her that she nearly sunk under it.

But the heroic girl retained her presence of mind, for she thought of Martha and Benny, as well as of herself. With an effort she repressed the cry which rose to her lips, and which must have instantly aroused the sleeping savage. Silently she turned to Martha, took the boy from her arms, whispered to her to follow without making any noise, and arose and hastened away from that dangerous locality.

The two girls moved almost as noiselessly as the leaves fall, for Martha knew that there must be some powerful reason for her cousin's action, and not until they had put a considerable distance between the sleeper and themselves was a word uttered by either.

Then Kate, overcome by her emotions more than by fatigue sunk down, with a low murmur of thankfulness for her escape.

"What is the matter?" anxiously asked her cousin. "Why did you start off so suddenly?"

"I had sufficient cause," replied Kate, with a shudder. "Martha, there was an Indian asleep within two feet of where we were sitting, and I put my hand on his head."

"Is it possible? How did he get there?"

"I can only account for it by supposing that he was one

of those who were at the house, that he had set out to search for us, and had fallen asleep among the bushes, overcome by the liquor he had drank."

"But we are so far from the house. I can't understand it."

"I am afraid that we have lost our course, and that we have been traveling in a circle. We must be much nearer to the house than we had supposed we were."

"This is terrible. What shall we do now?"

"We can do nothing, at present, but stay here and rest. Perhaps something may suggest itself. Hark!"

A yell was heard at a distance, followed in quick succession by other yells, all unmistakably uttered by enraged Indians.

"What is that?" asked Martha, in a frightened tone.

"The Indians—near the house, I suppose."

"What is the matter with them now?"

"I don't know. Perhaps father and Will have returned."

"Can the Indians have murdered them?"

"I think not. Those were yells of anger, and not of triumph. If the savages had killed any white men, they would have whooped with joy, and would not have ceased their yelling so soon. It is more likely that one of their own number has been killed."

"I would like to go further, Kate, if we knew what direction to take."

"We do know, now. I told you that something might suggest itself after a while. I have no doubt that the yelling was in the direction of the house. If we go away from that noise, we will be going away from the house."

"I hope so. Let us go."

Again the perplexed and unhappy fugitives took up their weary line of march through the forest, uncertain whither they were tending, wandering blindly, slowly and painfully, not knowing but that any step might bring them into the presence of lurking Indians.

Again they became so tired that they were obliged to stop to rest, and they sat down on the ground, Martha taking the child from the arms of her cousin.

They had rested here in silence but a short time, when Kate, who was reclining on the damp ground, with her head on her

arm, at a little distance from Martha, thought that she heard a slight rustling near her.

Involuntarily she raised her head and listened. Again she heard the noise, and was convinced that some one was crawling toward her.

She at once commenced to draw back, preparatory to flight; but she had not raised her arm from the ground, when there was a whizzing in the air, followed by a sharp and cutting sound, as a knife was struck into the earth near her elbow, cutting through the sleeve of her dress.

She quickly tore the dress loose, and turned to her cousin, taking Benny from her arms, and rising to go. Martha was in a tremor of excitement, and did not need to be told to follow.

"What is it?" she whispered, when Kate stopped, only a few yards from the spot where the blow had been struck.

"An Indian struck at me with his knife, and cut through my sleeve."

"Where is he now?"

"I have heard nothing more of him. I suppose he thought he had met an enemy, and was afraid to do any thing more in the darkness."

"The woods must be full of them. Are you not going to run away from this place?"

"No. If they are looking for us, they will not be likely to come right here. Let us wait behind this large tree."

While the two girls waited beside the tree, they were startled by a terrific war-whoop, at no great distance from where they were standing. It frightened them so much; that they started and ran blindly through the forest, their speed being accelerated by a series of yells that followed the whoop, and they did not stop until they were out of breath.

CHAPTER VII.

A SURPRISE.

"WHAT is to be done now, Kate?" asked Martha, as soon as she was able to speak.

"That question again! I do not know, my dear. We must do our best, and leave the rest to Providence. It seems that we run into danger in whatever direction we turn."

"Will this horrible night never come to an end? It seems to be darker than ever, if that is possible. I wonder if uncle Simon and Will have come home and found the house deserted. What must their feelings be! They can't help believing that we have been carried off by the Indians."

"It must be an awful thing for them to know that their own home has been attacked and harried by the savages, while they have been absent for the purpose of destroying the peace, if not the lives, of another family."

"May God have mercy upon them, and keep them from falling into the hands of those red murderers! Wickedly as they have acted, I hope they will not be made to suffer as we have suffered."

The two girls were silent for a while, as they sat and rested in the deep forest. The noise made by the Indians had ceased, and there was not a sound to break the extreme and painful stillness by which earth and air were bound.

"If those yells were made by the savages in looking for us," said Kate, "they must have abandoned the pursuit, for we hear nothing more of them."

"It is true that we can hear them no more," replied Martha, "but they may be none the less active. I can not understand how it is that they seem to be scattered all through the woods. There must be a great many of them, or they must be able to get about much more easily than we can, for we have been beset on all sides, and it is a wonder that they have not taken us. I wish we could get across the river."

"Come on, then. It can be no worse for us to go further

than to stay here. I have thought of a plan that will probably please you if we can carry it out."

"What is it, Kate?"

"You know that father has a canoe at the river. If we can find it, we may be able to float down to Mr. Wilson's, or, at least, may go as far as we can, until you think we are out of the way of the Indians."

"An excellent plan, Kate! Excellent, I mean, if we can find the river and the canoe; but I would like to know, in the first place, if you have any idea what direction we are to take to reach the river."

"I think I can strike the right course. While we have been here, I have been feeling of the trunks of the trees. You know that the bark is rougher and the moss is thicker on the north side. I think I can determine the northerly direction, and we have only to go toward the east to reach the river."

"True enough; but it is so dark that we will be unable to tell when we get to the river. We may reach the bank without knowing it, and may fall in and be drowned."

"I have provided for that. When we left the house, I put a candle in my pocket, with flint and steel, and I will now strike a light. With the help of the candle we ought to be able to find both the river and the boat."

"Dear Kate! How brave and how thoughtful you are! God alone knows what would have become of Benny and me, if you had not been with us this night."

Kate struck a light, and lighted her candle, and made her way toward the river, Martha following with Benny. The candle was not of much benefit to the fugitives, but it dispelled a portion of the darkness, enough to prevent them from running against the trees.

As Kate kept her face steadily toward the east, in due time they reached the river, a narrow stream, shaded by the foliage of the forest. They did not know whether they were above or below the place where the canoe was usually kept, but they followed the downward course of the stream, satisfied that that direction would at least lead them away from the house where they had left the Indians.

They were getting tired, and were nearly ready to give up

the quest as a hopeless one, when Kate uttered a cry of joy, for she had discovered the canoe, tied to a stump, in a little nook at the water's edge. It was a clumsy affair, having been dug out of a large log, but it was safe, and both the girls knew how to manage it.

They gladly got into the dug-out, Martha taking her seat at the bow, and holding the candle, while Kate sat in the stern with the paddle, and little Benny laid down in the middle.

Kate pushed off from the shore, sending the canoe out into the stream, where she allowed it to float down the current, guiding it with the paddle as well as she could in the darkness.

"I feel at ease now," said Martha, when they were fairly afloat. "It seems to me that we have got away from the Indians, and that we are safe at last. Can we get down as far as Mr. Wilson's, Kate, or is there shallow water to stop us?"

"I think we can go through, if the darkness will let us. There is a ford just below Mr. Wilson's, but none this side of his house."

"What will we do when we get there, Kate? There is no one on the farm but Mr. Wilson and his wife, and they are both old people."

"They are very good people, and we can warn them that there are Indians about, if we can do nothing more."

"I was not thinking of that. I meant that we could find no one there to help us."

"But we may find some one whom we can help. God has been very merciful to us to-night, cousin, and we ought not to miss an opportunity of showing our thankfulness by assisting others."

"That is true, Kate. You are more thoughtful than I am. Can't you make the boat go a little faster? I feel entirely safe now, but I would like to reach Mr. Wilson's as soon as possible."

"I don't want to go faster, Martha, for it is as much as I can do now to keep the boat in the stream, and I am continually afraid of running into the bank. With regard to our safety, I can not agree with you, for I do not really feel as safe as I did on the land."

"I am a little afraid of the water too, but I had rather drown than fall into the hands of the savages."

"It was the savages that I had reference to, for I am not afraid of the water. They can swim, Martha, and their bullets could easily reach us from the shore, if they should happen to see us. I think you had better put out that light, for it might attract the attention of some wandering Indian."

The words were hardly out of the lips of the brave girl, when there was a bright flash on the eastern shore of the river, followed by a sharp report, and a bullet whizzed across the water. Martha screamed, and dropped the candle in the boat, and her cousin uttered a slight cry of pain.

"Put out the light, and lie down in the bottom of the canoe!" whispered Kate, as she herself crouched down in the stern.

"What made you cry out in that way?" asked Martha, when she had hurriedly followed the direction of her cousin.

"Because I was hurt. That bullet hit me in the shoulder."

"God preserve us! You had better give me the paddle, and let me try to run the boat to the shore."

"No, the hurt is nothing. I am sure that it is only a slight wound, and I think I can manage the canoe better than you can."

Kate put out her arm over the side of the boat, and steered toward the west shore of the pond. In a few moments another shot incited her to greater exertions. The ball struck the canoe, but fortunately did not go through the wood, or it might have injured Benny, whose sleep in the bottom of the boat had not yet been disturbed.

"I think I hear some one swimming," whispered Martha. "Hurry and take the boat to the shore."

"Not just yet. A man must have good eyes who can find the canoe in this darkness. We must deceive them if we can."

Kate kept the canoe headed down-stream a little longer and then turned it in to the shore, striking the bank just below a bend in the river. She jumped ashore, lifted Benny out of the boat and put him in the arms of her cousin, and then pushed the dug-out into the stream, whispering to Martha to hurry up the bank.

"What does that mean?" asked Martha, when they thought they had reached a place of safety. "Why did you send the boat away?"

"So that the Indian who was swimming may follow it as far as he wants to. I would like to keep them from guessing where we landed."

"How thoughtful you are! Now, dear Kate, let us light the candle and look at your hurt."

"It ought to be looked after, I believe, for it has been bleeding badly, and it is quite painful now that it has got cold; but I am afraid to strike a light, for it might let the Indians know where we are."

"We are safe from them now, cousin, for we are away from the river. The light could hardly be seen ten feet from where we are sitting, and I am sure that your wound ought to be dressed."

As Martha was not to be dissuaded from her purpose, she lighted the candle and examined the wound.

She discovered that the bullet had struck Kate in the left arm, near the shoulder, making a bad cut in the flesh, but not touching the bone. Having washed the wound as well as she could, she bandaged it with a strip of her own linen, and Kate declared that she felt quite comfortable.

Martha had finished her surgery, and was replacing the dress over her cousin's shoulder, when she was startled by a loud grunt. Looking up, she saw a tall and ugly Indian standing near, contemplating the two girls with evident satisfaction.

"White squaw mighty smart," said he; "run mighty good; but Injun kotch um mighty fast."

Martha screamed, and would have tried to escape, but the savage took hold of her arms, and Kate was seized by another who stepped out from behind a tree.

In a few moments their hands were tied behind their backs with strips of bark, and Benny, whose slumber had not been broken, was also bound. The Indians then started a small fire, near which they made their captives sit down, admonished them to keep quiet and not to attempt to escape, pulled out their pipes and settled themselves down to smoke, as if they intended to pass the remainder of the night in that place.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISTAKES AND PERILS.

"THE Indians are not far off, Walter," said George Ryeburn, as he stood with his friend in Simon Atlee's house, listening to the echoes of the yell that they had heard in the forest.

"So it seems," answered Wilson; "but there was only one who yelled. He has probably found the body of the fellow that I killed."

"No doubt of that. The dogs hunt in packs, and I suppose they would all have been together, if some of them had not got drunk."

"I wonder which way they went when they left here. If I knew that, or could give a reasonable guess, I would follow them, for they can't travel very fast on such a night as this, encumbered with the girls and the little boy."

"They have either gone to attack some other house, or have hid themselves in the woods, to wait for daylight. My wonder is, what has become of Simon Atlee, for it is certain that he was not here when the house was entered."

"It is strange, indeed. I can't imagine where he could have gone to at night, and especially such a night as this."

"Unless he could have gone down to your house. I don't want to excite your fears, George, but he may have gone out for no good, and your presentiment may have been doubly true. I know that Will has been at home lately, for here is the cap that he always wears."

"You are right. Surely I have trouble enough for one night. I wish I could go home. I think I can find the way, Walter, and I must try to get there at all risks."

"I will go with you, and I will tell you how I think we can go without much difficulty. Simon Atlee has a canoe on the river, and generally keeps it a little below the place where we left our horses. If we can find the canoe, we can easily paddle it down the river, and stop when we judge that we have gone as far as your house."

"That will be easy enough, for there is a large tree that has fallen nearly across the river, opposite our house, and I can't miss it. Suppose we take a light, to help us find the way to the river."

"That would be very well, George, if we could be sure that the woods are not full of red-skins. I am willing enough to find the rascals, but I am not at all anxious that they should find us."

"We must go without a light, then, and must trust to your nose for informing us when we are about to run into danger. The red-skins may be able to see at night better than we can, but I doubt whether there is such a nose as yours among them."

The young men went out into the darkness, and closed the door behind them.

As George Ryeburn was feeling his way along the front of the house, his hands came in contact with some light substance that hung against the wall. He felt of it, and discovered that it was a piece of a sheet, and that it was suspended from the window above.

Instantly a new light flashed upon him, and he called to his companion to come and examine what he had found.

"Don't you see what it means, Walter?" he said. "It leads, I suppose, from the window of the garret in which the girls slept, and it is strong enough to hold my weight."

"Do you conclude from that that the girls have escaped by this means?"

"Yes. Is it not probable?"

"It is certainly possible that they may have let themselves down from the window, while the red-skins were drinking. If they have done so, they must be extraordinary girls."

"Kate is a very brave and smart girl, as well as a good one. If there was a chance, you may be sure that she has made good use of it."

"I have no doubt that they have escaped, or have tried to do so; but they may have been taken. What do you propose to do now?"

"I wish we could find them."

"So do I; but we might as well attempt to search for a needle in a haystack, as try to find them in these woods. If

the Indians did not take them here, they would not be likely to look for them in the darkness. I think we had better carry out your other plan."

"That we had better go down the river, to my father's house?"

"Yes; by way of the river."

"I suppose it will be the best thing to do, though I dislike to leave this place while it is possible that the girls may be somewhere about. We had better not go back by the way we came, because the Indians, if they have found the man you killed, will be likely to bury him there, and we might meet them."

"You are right. I had not given you credit for so much caution. Go on, and I will follow."

George Ryeburn led the way, and the two young men turned their faces toward the river, taking care to avoid the path by which they had come."

Again they were obliged to grope their way through the thick darkness with which the earth was covered as with a pall, and they found the task more difficult than before, as they had nothing to guide them but their own instinct and the bark of the trees.

They had passed over about half the distance between the house and the river, when George, who was still in the advance, suddenly stopped, and whispered to his companion to remain quiet.

Wilson halted, and stood motionless in his tracks, while his young friend got on his hands and knees, and noiselessly crept forward, diverging from the course which they had been following.

He had heard a slight noise among the bushes, and had come to the conclusion that an Indian was wandering or resting there, as they had seen no animals abroad that night.

When he reached the place from which the sound proceeded, he was confirmed in his belief, for he heard the sound of low and regular breathing. He crept still closer, and drew his knife.

It seemed a hard and unfair thing to kill a sleeping enemy; but he knew that an Indian would show him no mercy under

like circumstances, and he felt that his duty required him to kill them wherever he found them.

Raising his knife, he struck at the place where the breathing had been ; for he heard it no more, and he imagined that the savage had discovered him and was seeking to slay him.

The knife buried itself harmlessly in the ground, but, as George drew it out, he felt something tear loose from it.

He immediately threw himself back, expecting an assault from his unseen adversary ; but nothing of the kind ensued, and all was silent in the dark forest.

Somewhat mortified by this strange occurrence, he crept out from under the bushes, and returned to his friend.

"What was the matter?" asked Wilson.

"I thought there was an Indian lying under the bushes. I am sure that something was there, for I heard the breathing. I struck at him with my knife, and missed him. I then expected that he would strike at me, but he did nothing of the kind, and I came back."

"Perhaps he slipped away in the darkness. Perhaps it was not an Indian. I haven't smelt any red-skins lately."

"Your nose must be at fault this time, Walter, for I cut through his breech-cloth, or something about him, and brought off a piece of it on my knife."

"Give it to me."

Wilson took the knife, and examined the fragment of cloth.

"This was never worn by a red-skin," said he. "It is a piece of a woman's dress, if I am any judge of such articles."

"Let me feel of it, Walter."

When George examined the bit of cloth, he agreed with his friend that it had belonged to a white woman's dress.

"Who could it have been," said he, "but Kate Atlee or Martha Garnet? It must have been one of them."

"I think so."

"What shall we do now? Shall we go and find them?"

"It would be useless. They have probably hurried away, mistaking you for an Indian. If we should search for them, they would run the faster, thinking that they were pursued."

"Suppose we call them."

"That would only bring the red-skins down upon them, if

they are not already in the power of their enemies. We had better carry out the intention with which we started. If the girls are free, as I hope they are, they will try to make their way to the river, as we are doing, and we may meet them there, or on the way. It is our only chance."

"Lead on, if you think so. For my part, I have made up my mind that I will not be mistaken in that way again. It is awful to think that I may have struck at Kate, and so narrowly missed taking her life. If I meet another human being, I will be sure what and who it is, before I strike."

The young men again went forward toward the river; but they had not gone much further, when Wilson heard a noise before him, as of something moving through the forest, and he signified to his companion that he must remain quiet.

"It is the girls," said George, incautiously stepping forward. "Let me speak to them. Is that you, Kate? Martha, are you there?"

He was startled by a guttural Indian exclamation in reply, and two stalwart savages threw themselves upon the young men.

The ready knife of Wilson instantly found its way to the heart of one of them, and he fell with a moan. Ryeburn, who was not similarly prepared, grappled with the other, after receiving a slight wound.

The contest was an unequal one, for the Indian was more powerful than his young antagonist, and Wilson could not strike, for fear of hurting his friend. But George had pinioned the arms of his enemy, and they writhed and twisted and tore up the ground, in their efforts to throw each other, until the Indian slipped down out of George's hands, and disappeared with a smothered cry. At the same time the young man felt the ground melting, as it were, beneath his feet, and he was forcibly drawn back by his companion.

"You were nearly gone, George," said Wilson. "I know this place, for I came near being mired in that hole last winter. Your red-skin has sunk out of sight."

"Good riddance! We have put two of them out of the way of the girls, if they are really free and in the woods. I suppose we must be near the river."

"Yes. Follow me."

Wilson led the way, and the young men went forward confidently, until they reached the river, near the spot where their horses were tethered.

After seeing that the animals were safe, they proceeded down the bank, keeping as near as possible to the water's edge, until they reached the place where, as Wilson said, the boat was usually kept.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RESCUE.

"THERE is no canoe here," said Wilson, in a tone that evinced his disappointment. "The red-skins have stolen it, or Simon Atlee has gone off in it himself."

"Are you sure that this is the place where it was kept?" asked Ryeburn.

"Certain. I have used it so often, that I can easily tell the spot by feeling. I have never known it to be anywhere else, when it was not in use."

"I think we can make a discovery here, Walter. We can judge about how long it is since the boat was taken. If the Indians took it, we can probably tell whether the girls were with them. If Simon Atlee went off in it, we may find out how many men were with him."

"You are right, my boy. I will strike a light, and we will look into the question."

A light was obtained by kindling a little fire of leaves and twigs, and the two young men carefully examined the ground near the edge of the water.

They at once came to the conclusion that the canoe had recently been there, and that it had been removed during the night, and a further examination disclosed another important fact.

"It was the girls who went off in the canoe," said Ryeburn, "and they had no one with them but Kate's little brother. The tracks are here, plain enough, and there is not an Indian footmark among them."

"That settles the question," replied Wilson. "I have no doubt that the girls were in the house when the Indians entered it, that they escaped out of the window, that they made their way through the woods, and that they have gone off on the river in the canoe. I congratulate you, George, and I feel, myself, that a great weight has been lifted from my breast."

"It is a great wonder and a great mercy. I suppose we must give up trying to get down to father's house, until morning."

"I am not sure of that. Let us sit down awhile and talk about it."

As the young men seated themselves on the turf, the woods echoed to the sharp report of a rifle, and the faint scream of a woman was borne on the heavy air.

"Did you hear that, Walter?" asked Ryeburn, as he started up.

"Of course I did. I heard a rifle-shot."

"Nothing else? I thought I heard a cry."

"I believe I did, too, now that you have given it a name."

"Can it be that the Indians have found the girls and fired at them?"

"It is not only possible, but very likely, I am afraid."

"They can't be far off. Let us run and help them."

"Not so fast," said Wilson, restraining his friend as he was about to rush off into the forest.

"Don't stop me! There is not a minute to be lost."

"We may lose many minutes by being in too much of a hurry. You must remember that it is as dark as pitch. If we should run and tumble through the woods, we would only alarm the girls and put the Indians on their guard. The shot came from the other side of the river, I think. Now follow me, and be as quiet as a mouse."

Wilson leading the way, the two young men passed along the river-bank, keeping as near as possible to the water's edge, and straining their eyes, as if they wished to pierce the darkness with their sight, and see what was transpiring on the dark surface of the stream. Their progress was necessarily slow, as they moved with great caution and silence; but the way was not so difficult as that through the forest, and

Wilson was such a good guide, that they went on without any serious hindrance.

When they had gone about three hundred yards, they stopped, and laid their ears close to the ground, near the water, for the purpose of gaining information by listening.

"Don't you hear the noise of a paddle striking the water?" asked Ryeburn.

"I hear something of the kind, but I am inclined to think that the noise is made by a person swimming."

"Very likely. I tell you, George, I smell red-skin mighty strong, and I am sure that the rascals are not far from here. Follow me, and be as silent as you can."

Again they carefully worked their way down the bank, and had gone about three hundred yards further, when they again stopped and listened, but they heard nothing.

"I am afraid we are at fault," whispered Ryeburn. "There is nothing more to be heard. What does your nose say Walter?"

"My nose says that there are red-skins near us. I can smell them very plainly now. Come on, George. You mustn't make noise enough to wake a squirrel, and you must be ready to strike at any moment. I judge by the scent that we had better strike off from the river a little way."

Again they went on, feeling their way in the darkness among the trees and bushes, and taking pains to move silently, rather than rapidly. They had not gone much further, when Wilson halted, and uttered a low hiss, as a warning to his companion, who quietly crept up to his side.

"Look right ahead, George," whispered the leader. "Do you see any thing?"

"I can't say that I do."

"Don't you see a light? I can make it out quite plainly now, and I think I can see smoke rising above it."

"It is a light, Walter. I see it now."

"Red-skins are there, my boy. I can smell them as easily as you can smell a polecat. They have built a fire, I think, and are making themselves comfortable. We must crawl up on them as silently as snakes, for a great deal may depend on not disturbing them. Be sure that your rifle is ready, and that your priming is in order."

The young men now went on together, moving even more cautiously and silently than they had yet done. Dark as it was, they felt their way so carefully, and stepped so delicately, that not the breaking of a twig, or the rustling of a leaf, could have betrayed their presence.

With their eyes eagerly fixed on the faint glimmer that had attracted their attention, they cautiously crawled toward it, until they found themselves on the crest of a slight rise of ground, at the foot of which they plainly saw before them a small but bright fire. Seated by trees near the fire, with their arms bound, were two young women, whose features Wilson and Ryeburn could not discern, but they had no doubt that they were those for whom they were seeking, especially as a little boy was sleeping near them. By the side of them, and a short distance from them, were two Indians, lounging on the ground, and drowsily smoking their pipes.

"There is one for each of us," whispered Wilson. "I will take the furthest one. Aim well, and be sure that you don't hit the girls. Are you ready?"

"Ready."

"Aim—one—two—fire!"

The two rifles cracked simultaneously; the girls shrieked; the boy started up; one of the savages fell dead instantly, and the other, bounding into the air with a yell, fell back, and writhed and struggled on the ground. Wilson, who had run down to the fire with his friend, immediately put the wounded man out of his pain, and both hastened to release the girls, who overwhelmed their deliverers with blessings.

"What is this, Kate?" exclaimed Ryeburn, when he had untied her arms. "You are covered with blood. What does it mean?"

"It means that the Indians fired at us from the other shore, while we were in the boat, and that I was hit. But it is nothing, George, and you need not be in the least alarmed, for Martha and I examined and dressed it, just before the Indians came up and took us, and it is nothing but a slight flesh wound."

"How in the name of wonder did you escape from the red-skins? We feared that you had been carried off by them, until we discovered that you had taken the canoe."

"If you think we are safe here, I will sit down and tell you all about it."

The young men sat by the fire, while Kate related the adventures of herself and her cousin, taking care to make no mention of her father, except to say that he was absent when the house was entered.

"But *where* was your father when the red-skins came?" earnestly inquired Ryeburn. "Where could he have gone on such a night as this?"

"I am ashamed to tell you, George. I am afraid to tell you," replied Kate, blushing deeply.

"I will not press you. I think I can guess."

"I have no doubt that you can. You know what I was speaking to you about, George, the morning you left. It has troubled me ever since, and my fears have been realized at last. Brother Will came home last night, bringing with him two rough-looking men, and they and father all dressed and painted themselves like Indians, and went to your house in the early part of the night. You know that they went for no good purpose."

"The infernal villains! But you are not responsible for their sins, dear Kate. I believe that day is beginning to break, and I must hurry home, though it is hard to leave you."

"You must do no such thing, George," interposed Walter Wilson. "I will go to your father's. Believe me, it is better that I should go, and you must stay and take care of the ladies."

After some discussion Wilson's suggestion was agreed to, and he started off toward the river, just as the thick darkness began to melt before the light of dawn.

Wilson had been gone but a few moments when Kate Atlee became strangely uneasy. She looked up at the sky, where the gray tints of dawn were beginning to appear, then at the forest in the direction in which the young man had disappeared, and then arose and walked impatiently about.

"What is the matter, Kate?" asked George Ryeburn.

"I am not well. I feel restless. I am troubled."

"We are all troubled, Kate; but we must bear it, and we must try to be patient."

"Is it easy to get to your house now, George?"

"It is not difficult. We can almost step across the river at the ford now, when it is light enough to see it."

"Do you mean the place where the big tree has fallen across?"

"Yes. Are you thinking of Wilson? You need not give yourself any trouble about him, for he can find the way without any difficulty. Sit down, Kate, and try to be quiet."

"I am not thinking of Wilson. George, I must go down there."

"Down where?"

"To your father's house."

"Are you crazy, Kate? You must not think of such a thing."

"I can't help thinking of it, and I must go."

"Why should you run into danger? You could do no good."

"My father and my brother are there, George. Wickedly as they have acted, they are mine, and I love them. They will do some great wrong, or they will be killed. Perhaps I could put a stop to the trouble; perhaps I could draw them off. I might do something, and I feel that I ought to try."

"Even if you could, Kate, it is now too late. All the harm that was possible has been done, I am afraid, before this time."

"While there is doubt there is hope, though God only knows what may have happened there. Oh, George! it pains me more than I can tell, to feel that it is my family that has caused such trouble to yours."

"But it is not you, Kate," said George, soothing her as well as he could, for she had burst into tears. "Whatever has happened, you may be sure that I will not lay it up against you, who are so good, and pure, and innocent."

"Let me go, George," pleaded the agitated girl.

"There is no one to go with you, and you can not go alone. There are Indians in the woods, as you know, and you would be in danger at every step. Sit down and calm yourself, for we can do nothing but wait."

Martha Garnet added her entreaties to those of George Ryeburn, and Kate sat down upon the ground near them, but she was still troubled and restless. Martha laid down by

the side of Benny, and George, with his head resting on his hand, fell into a profound reverie.

"I will tell you what we can do, Kate," said the young man, at last. "We can go up to where—"

He stopped suddenly, as he looked around, for Kate was nowhere to be seen.

He asked Martha what had become of her, but she did not know.

Springing to his feet, he called her, but there was no reply.

He then hastily searched the woods, calling her name as he did so, but he could find no trace of her.

Once he started to run, in the direction that Wilson had taken, but the thought of Martha and the helpless child recalled him, and he came back to them, looking very sorrowful and dejected.

"What can have become of her?" asked Martha.

"It is very plain; she has followed Wilson; she has gone down to my father's house."

"Can you not overtake her and bring her back?"

George shook his head mournfully, though he kept his wistful eyes turned toward the direction in which he supposed she had gone.

"It is doubtful whether I could overtake her," he said, "as she was determined to go, and I must not attempt it, for I have you and Benny to look after. She has taken the rifle that belonged to one of those dead Indians. It is strange that I did not hear her when she went. We can only pray for her, Martha."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ADVENTURE OF ALICE.

ALICE RYEBURN had not left her father's house rashly, or without due forethought and calculation of the probabilities of success in her enterprise.

She had anticipated that her parents would refuse to permit her to attempt to make her way to the fort, but she had

none the less determined that she would go there, in spite of all hazards. Believing that she would be able to reach the fort, even through the darkness of that night, she thought that duty called upon her to make the attempt, although she must do it against the wishes of her parents.

The darkness of the night, she considered, would be rather a benefit than an impediment to her, as it would enable her to avoid the enemies who were gathered about the house, while she could pick her way through the most difficult places on the route, by the aid of a lantern which she intended to carry.

As soon as it was certain that she could not go with the consent of her father and mother, she secretly lighted the lantern—a small one, made of plates of horn scraped very thin—and concealed it under her dress. She then watched for an opportunity to slip out of the house without being observed.

Her opportunity came sooner than she had hoped for it. When the other members of the family were attracted into the back room by the cry of the negro woman, there was no one left in the front room but herself, her little brother, and the sick child.

Alice saw that her time for action had come. She threw a shawl over her head, unbarred the door, and called her little brother to her.

"I must go out for a few minutes, Sammy," she whispered, "and I want you to put up the bars, and to open the door when I ask you to let me in."

The boy promised to do so, and Alice slipped out of the door, closing it behind her.

Stepping as lightly as a bird, and hardly daring to draw her breath, she sped swiftly through the darkness toward the forest, instinctively taking a direction that would not lead her toward the place where she had first seen the assailants with a light.

Reaching the cover of the woods in safety, though almost breathless, she cast a hurried glance behind her, and plunged on into the gloom, feeling her way among the trees as well as she could, for she was no more able to see than if she had been securely blindfolded.

When she judged that she was beyond the possibility of being seen from the house, she drew out her lantern, knelt

down, and fervently thanked God for his mercy in preserving her thus far, praying that she might be supported and protected during the remainder of her difficult and perilous journey.

Having finished her prayer, she arose, and calmly considered the course which she should take, before setting out.

The fort was situated about a mile from her father's house, but it was, fortunately, on the same side of the river, and she would have no ford to find and wade through. She could easily reach the road, which she could follow more than half the way, and then there was a dry "branch" through which a small stream had once flowed into the river, and she could pass over its gravelly bed until she came within a short distance of the fort. She had often traveled this route in going to and from the fort, and knew it so well that she had no fear of missing her way.

She again set forward cheerily, and walked briskly over the level road, confident of her ability to reach the fort and sure that she would find assistance when she got there. She well knew that the young officer who was in command of the post was so entirely devoted to her, that he would be rejoiced to have an opportunity of serving her or her friends. She also knew that he would not accuse her of rashness or unwomanlike conduct, in going to seek assistance, but would praise her bravery and love her all the better for it.

Captain John Hood, although only twenty-seven years of age, had seen a great deal of service in the Indian wars, and had acquired considerable reputation by his bravery and his abilities as a scout and a commander. He had attained the rank of captain in the militia, and had been, because of his experience and superior intelligence, unanimously chosen by the settlers in that neighborhood to take charge of the fortification which they had built for their protection. He had successfully repelled several attacks of the Indians, and his military administration had given entire satisfaction to the people. He was an unmarried man, but his father's family lived within the inclosure, and were, at times, the sole residents at the fort. At other times it was crowded with the families of the neighbors, who came in to seek safety from anticipated excursions of the Indians.

Captain Hood had been for some time the accepted lover of Alice Ryeburn, and it was generally agreed that a better match could not be made, for Alice possessed beauty, amiability and good sense, and the young soldier, although he was not rich, was highly respected for his good principles and his many excellent qualities. The course of true love, in this case, had run very smoothly, and the marriage of the lovers was expected to take place in the autumn of that year—1780.

Alice Ryeburn was fully justified, therefore, in seeking Captain Hood and appealing to him for assistance. The aid that he was bound to give to any family that should be attacked, would be given with double alacrity, she well knew, for her sake and on her representation. She felt that her journey would not only be of service to her relations, but would bring her to the man whom she loved better than any other, and this thought strengthened and encouraged her on her dark and lonely way.

She had nearly reached the place where the road was intersected by the "branch," when she was sure that she heard voices ahead. She immediately covered the lantern with her shawl, stepped aside into the forest, and concealed herself among the bushes.

The noise of the voices increased, and gradually approached her. She shuddered as the persons who were talking came opposite to her retreat, for she knew, although she could not see them, that they were Indians. They had evidently been drinking, for they were jabbering at a great rate in their own language, and they stumbled from side to side of the road, as if they were unable to walk steadily.

It was natural that Alice should be frightened, and she crouched down in her hiding-place, fearful that she might be discovered, for she had always heard that the Indians could see in the dark, almost as well as cats and owls.

They passed by, leaving her unmolested, and it was with a sigh of relief that Alice heard their voices dying away in the distance. She stepped out into the road, uncovered her lantern and hastened up the dry bed of the "branch."

"Those were surely Indians," she thought, as she paused to gather breath. "No white men ever talked as they did. Their language and their tones were undoubtedly those of

savages. Father must have been mistaken when he told us that it was Simon Atlee and some other white men who attacked our house. It was his prejudice that made him say so. They were Indians, I do believe, and they will not scruple to burn down the house, if they find it impossible to enter it. I must hurry to the fort, for I am afraid that even now I will be too late."

She quickened her steps, in her eagerness to get on as rapidly as possible, but it would have been well for her if she had proceeded more cautiously and slowly, for her foot caught in a water hole, and she was thrown down on the stony bed of the "branch."

Her lantern was broken and the light extinguished, and when she drew her foot out of the hole, she discovered that she had sprained her ankle so badly that it was almost impossible for her to walk.

This was a terrible condition of affairs, and poor Alice felt it to be so. She had never calculated on the possibility of losing her light, nor had she supposed that her journey would be abruptly broken up by a sudden lameness.

Still, she was determined to proceed if possible. She arose with difficulty, and attempted to walk, but she found that she could hardly step on her lame foot, and soon she was obliged to totter to the side of the "branch," where she sunk down on the ground, under the trees.

This trouble was too much for the poor girl's fortitude. She felt that her difficult enterprise had been uselessly undertaken, that she had proceeded thus far in vain, for she would be unable to reach the fort, while her father's house would be burned and her family murdered by the savages. In this desperate predicament, nothing but a flood of tears could relieve her overburdened emotions, and she buried her face in her hands, and cried most heartily.

She was soon aroused from the indulgence of her grief by a new and undefinable danger.

Up the bed of the "branch" she heard the footsteps of some large animal. Listening attentively, with her ears stretched by fear, she also heard a smothered growling and a heavy breathing, with an occasional whining and scratching.

Alice was fairly frightened. A cold chill ran through her

veins, and she shook with terror. She would have attempted to escape, but her ankle now pained her so much, that she could not move it. She could only look and listen, in agonizing expectation of being seized and devoured.

The sounds rapidly came nearer, and the trembling Alice knew that the beast was looking for her, and would soon find her, when the worst would be realized. She strained her eyes to pierce the thick darkness, although she could see nothing; but the steps and the breathing came close to her side. She reached out her hand, and it touched the shaggy coat of the animal. With a wild shriek, she fell on the ground and fainted.

When she came to her senses, a tall young man, with a lantern in his hand, was bending over her, and a large Newfoundland dog at his side was wagging his tail most vigorously.

Alice opened her eyes wide, and uttered a joyful exclamation as she recognized Captain Hood.

"What does this mean?" eagerly asked her lover. "How do you happen to be here, Alice? Thank God that you are safe! I was at first afraid that you had been killed."

"There are Indians at our house, John. I slipped out in the darkness to come to the fort for help, but I fell down near here, and broke my lantern and sprained my ankle. But, we have no time to talk. Hurry back to the fort, and get some men to go down to the house with you. I am afraid it will be burned and all will be murdered before you can get there."

"Come on, then, Alice. Let me help you."

"I can't go with you, John. My ankle is so badly sprained that it will not bear my weight."

"I will carry you."

"No; I would be too heavy, and would make you lose time. Hurry back, and never mind me."

"But I can not leave you here alone."

"You need not leave me here alone. Let Boone stay with me, and I shall have no fear."

"That will do. If it had not been for Boone, I do not believe that we would have found you. He will take good care of you, and I will return very soon."

Captain Hood spoke to the dog, which ran to Alice,

received her caresses, and then sat down by her side, looking as if he accepted the responsibility. His master, with a cheering farewell to Alice, hastened toward the fort.

The captain returned in a very short time, though his absence seemed a long one to Alice. He was fully armed, and eager to meet the savages.

"I will have a dozen good men here in a few minutes," said he. "Now, Alice, I want you to tell me all about it."

Alice told her story in as few words as possible, and asked her lover if she had done wrong in endeavoring to procure assistance against the will of her parents.

"I can not blame you, my dear, brave girl," he replied. "It was a dangerous venture, but you acted for the best, and you would have succeeded, if it had not been for your accident."

As they were talking, a number of men came down from the fort, and Alice found herself surrounded by friends, all of whom were well armed and willing to serve her. One of them led a horse, upon which she was carefully lifted, and the party set out for Jacob Ryeburn's house.

Captain Hood walked by the side of Alice, and talked with her as she rode. She asked him how he had happened to find her, and what he had been doing away from the fort.

"The truth is," he replied, "that I had what is called a presentiment about you. It came on me last evening, and I could not shake it off. I felt sure that something had happened, or was about to happen, to you or your family. I could not account for the feeling, but it troubled me so much, that I at last concluded to take my rifle and a lantern, and go down to your house, in spite of the darkness, to make sure that you were all safe. I took no one with me but Boone, because I was ashamed to let any one know my reason for leaving. I would have passed you without noticing you, had it not been for the dog, who became uneasy, and at last left me, as if he was looking for something. In a few minutes I heard your cry, and ran to the place where I found you."

"It was truly providential, and I will always be grateful to Boone. I have only to hope now that we may reach the house in time."

"I hope so, indeed. Could you tell whether the party of Indians was a large one?"

"It was quite a small one, as well as we could judge. Father was inclined to think that they were not Indians, but I met two men on the road, who were not white men, I know."

"Who does your father suppose they are, if they are not Indians?"

"He thought that they might be Simon Atlee and some other men."

"I should consider it possible, if you had not met the other two Indians. I hardly know whether to be glad or sorry that your father was mistaken about it."

"Why do you say so?"

"Because I would be sure, if Atlee was at the head of them, that they would not go so far as to burn down the house; but I would be very sorry to learn that he had engaged in such a disreputable business. Come, gentlemen, we must go a little faster. I believe that day is beginning to break at last."

CHAPTER X.

CLOSE WORK.

JACOB RYEBURN and his family had quite a long interval of peace after the disappearance of Alice. It was so quiet around the house, and there was, apparently, such an entire cessation of hostilities, that Mrs. Ryeburn ventured to suggest that their enemies had abandoned the siege in despair, and had gone away.

"No such good luck as that," said the old man. "They have not gone far, or they are only plotting some new devilment. I can't imagine what they will undertake next, but I know that Simon Atlee is not a man to leave his work half done, or to give up a thing when he has once started to do it."

"Do you still think that it is Simon Atlee who is making all this trouble?"

"I feel quite certain that he is at the bottom of it, if he is not one of them."

"Do you believe that he is so mean and villainous as to want to attack his neighbor's house, and murder him in cold blood?"

"I believe him to be mean and villainous enough for any thing, if he was not afraid of being found out in it. He is just the man to disguise himself as an Indian, and commit any kind of rascality, if he believed he would not be suspected."

"It is horrible to think of. For my part, I can not help believing that the men outside are really Indians, and I am afraid that they are bringing brush up to the house, for the purpose of setting fire to it."

"If that is the case, Mary, we have nothing to do but to submit, for we have no means of preventing it. Even if we could get at the fire with water, we have no water, except a pailful or so, and no chance of getting any."

"Then we must burn with the house, or rush out and be murdered."

Mr. Ryeburn was silent.

"We must trust in God," continued his wife. "I am glad that dear Alice is not here to perish with us, if, indeed, she is still alive. What could have possessed her to go out on such a night, and in the midst of such danger?"

"You know well enough, Mary, why she has gone, and where she has gone. When we refused to let her go out for the purpose of trying to get to the fort, she determined to go without our consent. It is plain enough that she has attempted to find her way to the fort. There was nothing else that she would be at all likely to do."

"True enough. I would not have asked the question, if I had reflected, but we are in such great trouble that my head is nearly turned."

"It is foolish, as I think, to trouble ourselves about things that can't be helped. We must do our best, and that is all we can do."

"Do you suppose that she can reach the fort?"

"It is possible, but the errand is a dangerous one. That is another matter which we must trust to Providence."

Alice is out of our reach, and her fate is in the hands of God."

"May God help her! and may He help us, too, in this trying time! Jacob, is there no way by which we can look out or listen, so as to discover what they are doing outside? If they have not gone away, they must have laid some deep plan for destroying us, this time."

"We must try. I will send Hannab up-stairs, to look out of the window there."

The negress was sent up into the garret, but she soon reported that she could see nothing but darkness that was blacker than herself. She was told to stay there and listen, as her ears might be more serviceable than her eyes.

"Come here, father," said Sammy, who had been sitting by the fireplace, listening and watching intently.

"What do you want, my son?"

"There is a funny noise here in the chimney. It has been going on for some time, and I can't tell what it is."

Mr. Ryeburn knelt down on the floor beside the boy, and listened with him. He soon heard enough to induce him to remove the screen, and to get inside of the fireplace. He also called his wife to come and listen with him.

"Do you not hear it, Mary?" he asked, after they had been silent a little while.

"I hear a noise, like a scratching or gnawing. What can it be?"

"To me it sounds more like cutting and digging, than like scratching and gnawing. The rats are human rats, wife, and those are the worst kind."

"What can they be doing?"

"They are digging through the chimney, and mean to get in at the fireplace. The idea is a simple one, and I think it ought to have occurred to me as soon as it occurred to them. I now know that the scoundrels are white men, for you never catch the red-skins undermining, or doing any such work."

"What can we do about it, Jacob? Is it possible to stop them, or to keep them out?"

"We can do nothing to stop them. If they make a hole in the chimney, and try to come through, one at a time, we may be able to shoot them as they come, and may get the

best of them, if there are not too many of them. But, I reckon, they won't be content with digging a hole in the chimney. I wouldn't try it, if I was in their place, and I don't believe they can do it."

"What will they do, then?"

"They will find it much easier to pull out the sticks than to cut them, and it is likely that they will take out the whole bottom part of the chimney. I wish it would fall down on them; but I suppose they will have sense enough to prop it up."

"Can we do nothing? Must we sit here and see ourselves undermined?"

"Tell you what, Mars'r Jake," suggested Tom, "can't we stuff de chimbly up wid logs?"

"Perhaps it might be done, Tom, if there were any more logs, but there are none. If we should remove those which we piled up against the back-door, it would let the wretches in right away. I will tell you what we can do, wife, and it will be the only chance left to us, if they succeed in getting through the chimney, as I have no doubt they will. We can go up into the garret and draw the ladder after us, and can either barricade the trap or guard it with our rifles. We ought to be able to keep them at bay, and hold out until daylight. It seems to me that it can't be a great while to morning."

"If there is ever to be any more daylight," said Mrs. Ryeburn, "we shall not have to wait long for it. But what is that noise?"

"A shrill and prolonged yell, expressive of surprise and anger, was heard outside of the house, evidently proceeding from the near forest.

"That was no white man's yell," exclaimed the old man, starting up. "It came from a red-skin's throat, as sure as snakes are snakes."

"You are mistaken, then, Jacob, and they are really Indians who have attacked the house."

"There is something strange about it, and I confess that I can't understand it. I wish you would all keep perfect silence for a few minutes."

All was still, as Jacob Ryeburn crept into the chimney.

place again, and listened attentively, with his head against the stones. In a few minutes he came out, looking as if he had learned something that he was confident of.

"I was right," said he. "Those men outside are white men, and Will Atlee is one of them, for I recognized his voice."

"If you are sure of it, we know what to expect, and that is some consolation," said his wife. "Can you judge how long it will take them to dig through the chimney?"

"Not very well; it will depend on how they work; but it ought not to take them an hour, and we don't know how long they have been at it."

Hannah, who had come down to make her report, corroborated the opinion of her master concerning the assailants, saying that she had heard people talking outside. She could not understand what they said, but she was sure that they spoke like white men.

"We must get ready to go up above," said the old man, "for we can't tell how soon they may come through."

As he was arranging the ladder, a light knocking was heard at the front door.

"I wonder what's up now," he said, as he went to the door, and asked what was wanted.

"I want to git in thar," said the voice of a white man. "I am chased by Injuns, and they will kill me if I can't git in somewhar out of their way."

"Who are you, and where did you come from?"

"I am a stranger in these parts, and it was so dark that I lost my way. Hurry up and open the door, if you don't want me to be murdered."

"If you don't hurry up and get away from there, I will send a bullet through your head," replied the old man, in a voice of passion. "No honest man would be abroad on such a night as this. I know who you are, you infernal scoundrel; you are one of Simon Atlee's gang, who have been trying to break into my house."

"You are mistaken thar, stranger. My name ain't Atlee, and I don't know any such folks. The Injuns are right out here in the woods, and they'll git me if you don't let me in. Thar ain't nobody with me."

"Perhaps he speaks the truth, and is really in danger," suggested Mrs. Ryeburn. "It would be a pity if our fear should prevent us from being merciful."

"Don't be foolish, wife," roughly exclaimed Jacob Ryeburn. "It would be a much greater pity if I should open the door and let in that gang to murder us. Be off, you scoundrel! I know you are lying, and I tell you that you can't get into this house to-night."

"I will get in, and will make you pay for this," muttered the man, as he went away from the door.

"That was only a trick to let the Atlees into the house," said Jacob Ryeburn. "I have no doubt that the others were standing near, ready to rush in, if the door had been opened. Now, wife, you and the children must get up-stairs. Tom and I will stay down here and watch a while longer."

The sick child was carried up the ladder, and Mrs. Ryeburn, together with Hannah and Sammy, went into the garret, placing themselves in a corner where they would not be likely to be struck by bullets, if any such missiles should be flying about.

Mr. Ryeburn sent up all the axes and other weapons, except the two rifles, and then stationed himself near the fire-place, with Tom, to watch the operations of the assailants.

They had not waited long, when one of the stones that formed the back of the fire-place was seen to shake, and some dirt fell out of the cracks.

Jacob Ryeburn immediately beckoned to Tom, and the two men quietly ascended the ladder, which they drew up into the loft after them. They then took their stations near the trap, opposite the chimney, having placed a candle so that it would throw light into the lower room.

In a few minutes the great back of the fire-place fell in with a crash, and several men rushed in through the opening, under cover of the dust and noise.

Telling Tom to reserve his fire, the old man leveled his rifle, and shot down among them as soon as he could see any thing to shoot at. A groan and a heavy fall told that the bullet had done its work. The rest of the party below, seeing where the shot had come from, covered the trap with their rifles.

"Look here, Jake Ryeburn," said a voice which the old man readily recognized as that of Simon Atlee, "if you don't come out of that hole, I will hunt you out almighty-quick. There is no use in keeping dark any longer, and you may as well know that I am here. I didn't come to kill you, but now I mean to make an end of you, and if you don't give up, I will set fire to the house and burn up you and your whole tribe. I will, by satan! You have killed one of my men, and you must die!"

"I wish it had been yourself, you murdering villain!" exclaimed Jacob Ryeburn. "I am not afraid of you, Simon Atlee, and I dare you to do your worst. It is nearly day, and I will soon have help from the fort, when you will be caught, like a rat in a trap."

"You needn't calculate on that, you old fool," replied Atlee, "for we caught the nigger that you sent to the fort, and the woods are full of my Injuns."

"I didn't send any nigger," chuckled Ryeburn, "and you will make nothing by lying about it. I advise you to keep out of the way of your Indians. Look out, Mary, and see if that isn't day breaking in the east."

"Yes!" joyfully exclaimed Mrs. Ryeburn. "It is getting light. Hark!"

The report of a rifle in the woods was heard, followed by a yell. Almost at the same moment, a shot was fired below, but not at those in the loft. An Indian had inserted his head and shoulders through the opening in the chimney, and a bullet from the ready rifle of Will Atlee had pierced his brain.

"Confound it!" muttered Simon Atlee; "we are in a fix here. The red-skins are outside, and day is breaking, and Buck Turl is dead. I wonder who fired that other shot. Stuff that fellow's body into the hole, boys. We must make a fire quick, and look out for ourselves."

The directions of the old ringleader were obeyed. Bedding and other articles were piled in a corner of the room, in spite of the efforts of Jacob Ryeburn to get a shot at the assailants, and a bright light below soon told him that they were attempting to set fire to the house.

CHAPTER XI.

A SHOT IN TIME.

DAY was really breaking when Walter Wilson left his friend and the rescued girls, and set out toward Jacob Ryeburn's house. He had not gone far when he could plainly see faint streaks of dawn in the eastern sky, and he soon began to distinguish the dark outlines of the trees.

Gladdened by these signs of approaching day, he hastened onward, for he was not only anxious to visit the home of his friend, and learn whether any disaster had befallen his family, but he felt sure that the Indians whom he had met were not the only ones in the forest, and he burned with desire to procure assistance and hunt down the hated foes of the white race.

He crossed the river without difficulty, and soon found himself in the main road, which he followed until it brought him within a short distance of Jacob Ryeburn's house.

Wishing to go as near as possible to the house without being discovered, he made a circuit, keeping under cover of the forest, until he reached a point from which he could plainly see the building and the grounds about it.

It was now light enough for him to distinguish objects quite readily, but he could see nothing, from the position in which he was placed, to induce him to believe that the house had been attacked. The front door, opposite which he stood, was closed, as was usually the case at that hour, and all was quiet about the premises. There was nothing to show that the family had been disturbed, or that they were not then sleeping in peace and security.

Could it be possible, he thought, that Kate Atlee had been mistaken in what her father and brother had said, or that they had merely been jesting when they talked about going down to Ryeburn's house and attacking it? It was not probable there was any mistake about it, especially when he considered the character of Kate as a girl of truth and good sense,

and the fact that they had gone off in a body, disguised as Indians

It might be that they had lost their way, or abandoned the undertaking; but, if that had been the case, they could have found their way back home, and would, in all likelihood, have gone there.

As they had specially chosen the dark night for their purpose, it was not probable that they were lying hid in the forest, waiting until daylight to accomplish their object.

Satisfied that the harm had been already done, if any had really been intended, Wilson concluded to go around the house, and examine it on all sides, before attempting to enter.

As he turned for this purpose, he caught sight of an Indian, crouching among the bushes, a short distance from where he was standing.

Creeping from tree to tree, he silently advanced toward the Indian, in order to get a closer view of him, and to ascertain whether he was a red or white man, but he was unable to solve the question with any degree of certainty. The man might be Simon Atlee, or one of his disguised gang; but that mattered little to Wilson, who, on the principle of killing a snake whenever he found one, raised his rifle, took deliberate aim and fired.

The Indian, who was shot through the head, flung up his arms, and fell back dead.

Wilson was running up to the fallen man to examine him, when he was startled by a piercing yell in the forest near him, and almost at the same instant he heard a shot, which seemed to come from the house or its neighborhood.

Somewhat bewildered by the latter circumstance, he at first hesitated what to do, but soon determined to take cover. It was well that he did so, for, as he sprung behind the tree, a bullet whizzed by his head.

Hastily reloading his rifle, he watched to get a shot at his antagonist, when, to his dismay, he discovered that he had two of them. His position was a good one behind the tree, but like many other positions, it was liable to be flanked, and this was undoubtedly the object of his adversaries. One of them, he knew, was behind an oak tree, and the other, he felt, by

that instinct which often supplies the place of sight and hearing to the keen woodsman, was circling around unseen, in order to get on his flank or rear.

In this dilemma, Wilson began to think of retreating; but such a movement would have been attended with danger, as he would have been certain to draw the fire of the Indian who was hid behind the oak.

He determined, before retreating, to watch the movements of the foe who was endeavoring to get on his flank, hoping to be able to shoot him before his object could be accomplished.

It was not an easy thing to do, as he did not know whether the Indian was moving on his right or his left, and he was obliged to watch both sides, and, at the same time, to keep himself covered from the fellow behind the tree, who stood ready to take advantage of the least indiscretion of his antagonist.

When Wilson caught sight of the enemy who was most to be dreaded, he discovered, to his dismay, that he had established himself behind a tree at his left. A brief movement further would take him to another tree, where the line of his fire would be nearly at right angles to that of the other, and the white man could hardly hope to escape being shot by one of them.

As a last resource, he edged around the tree a little, and raised his rifle for the purpose of getting a shot at the man on the left, when he should attempt to reach the next tree.

As he waited anxiously for some movement on the part of his adversary, the crack of a rifle rung through the woods, and the Indian who was behind the large oak jumped up with a yell, and fell dead. The other looked out hastily and incautiously from his cover, and the next instant Wilson's bullet spun through his head.

The young man stepped out and commenced to reload his rifle, looking about to discover who it could be that had come to his aid so opportunely.

The mystery was soon solved. He heard the rustle of a woman's dress, and the next moment Kate Atlee, greatly agitated, and holding a rifle in her hand, hastened to him.

"Is this you, Kate?" he exclaimed. "Did you fire that shot just now?"

"Yes. Did I hit anybody? Where is my father? Where is Will?"

"I don't know. I have seen no one but these Indians."

"Are you sure that they are Indians? Let us look and see."

"Directly. I have no doubt that these are Indians, but I will examine them to satisfy you. You ought to try to calm yourself, for you are too much excited. Let me load your rifle. There must be more red-skins in the woods, and a woman who can shoot as well as you can ought to keep her gun charged."

Kate handed him the rifle, which her trembling hand could hardly hold, and he proceeded to pour in some powder and to ram down a bullet.

"Suppose I should have killed my father," she said, in a frightened whisper. "I am so troubled that I can hardly stand."

"It is not likely that you have killed any white man," answered Wilson, as he finished priming the rifle. "I am quite certain that these are red-skins. Come; we will look at them now."

Wilson examined the bodies of the Indians, including that of the one he had killed when he first came on the ground, and soon convinced Kate that there was no white man among them. She was greatly relieved, and he persuaded her to rest a few moments, as she was really too much exhausted to stand.

"That was an excellent shot that you made," said he. "I would like to know how you happened to see that Indian and to kill him so quick."

"I saw you first," replied Kate. "When I was about to call you, I saw that Indian watching you from behind a tree, and I concluded that you must be watching another, as you were looking in another direction, with your rifle raised. I tried to take aim, shut my eyes, and fired, but I am afraid that I can take no credit to myself for that shot."

"It was a good shot, nevertheless. How did you come here, Kate?"

"I crossed the river and came down the road."

"I meant to ask you why you came."

"My father and my brother were here, as I supposed, and I felt that I ought to come."

"Where is George Ryeburn?"

"I left him with my cousin Martha and little Benny."

"Did he know you were coming here? Did he not try to stop you?"

"I told him that I wanted to come, but he said that I must not think of such a thing. I watched my chance, and slipped away from him."

"You have done very wrong, I am afraid. This will trouble George greatly. You can do no good here. It is a wonder that you were not killed on the way, for the Indians seem to be scattered all through the woods."

"Where is my father? Where is my brother Will? Do you know nothing about them? What has happened here?"

"I know nothing at all about them. As I told you, I had seen no one but these red-skins. The house is quiet, and seems to be shut up, as if Mr. Ryeburn's people are safe and asleep as usual."

"Let us go around on the other side. If we can see nothing there, we ought to awake the sleepers and get into the house in some way. We must find out, for a certainty, whether any thing has happened here."

Wilson assented to this, and they walked around to the other side of the house, still keeping in the cover of the trees.

They thus came opposite to the chimney through which the hole had been dug by Atlee and his assistants. The window that looked out of the garret, however, was in the other end of the building.

Although it was nearly an hour since day had begun to dawn, the air was filled with a thick mist, or fog, which rendered it difficult to distinguish objects clearly, even at a little distance. But Wilson was sharp sighted enough to perceive that something was the matter with the chimney, and he called Kate's attention to it.

"Let us go to the house," she said. "I am convinced that something has happened there."

"Wait a moment. I thought I heard a noise behind us."

Stay here, Kate, while I scout around a little. I should hate to have some sneaking red-skin fire at us while we are walking to the house. You had better take your rifle."

When Wilson had left her, Kate kept her gaze intently fixed upon the house, and directly she saw a man in the garb of an Indian, who came out of the hole in the chimney, and ran toward the place where she was standing.

As he approached her, she perceived that he was not an Indian, and ran forward to meet him, thinking that it might be her father or her brother.

"Stop! Who are you?" she shouted, seizing him by the arm before he could get out of her way.

"Ef it ain't Will Atlee's sister!" exclaimed the man, trying to shake her off. "What are you doing here, gal? You are adzackly in the wrong place, sure as my name is Sim Trotter!"

"Where is my father? Where is my brother Will?" asked Kate, who would not be shaken off.

"They are in that house yonder. You had better not go thar, gal. Buck Turl is killed, and thar is death in thar!"

Without regarding this forcible injunction, Kate released her hold upon his arm, and ran toward the house like a frightened deer.

CHAPTER XII.

KATE AND HER FATHER.

KATE quickly reached the house, and attempted to enter it by the hole that had been dug through the chimney.

As she did so, her hand fell upon something cold, and she knew that she had touched the cheek of a corpse. When she withdrew the hand, her fingers were sticky with blood. Whose could the corpse be? Was it her father's or her brother's, or that of one of the innocent victims of their midnight outrage? Could it be possible that they had killed Alice Ryeburn or her little brother?

With almost frantic energy she shoved the body to one side, and pushed in through the stones and dust that strewed the opening.

The sight that met her view when she entered the room was so terrible, that for the moment it paralyzed her senses.

In the back part of the house—the curtain that had formed the partition having been torn down—were her father and her brother, and in the front room, in a pool of blood, lay the body of a stout man, disguised as an Indian.

Simon Atlee was in a corner, among the smoldering embers of a pile of bed-clothing, kindling a fire against the side of the house, and grumbling and cursing at his work. Will stood near him, with his rifle at his shoulder, watching the trap-door that led into the garret. The room was filled with a stifling smoke and a strong odor of burnt feathers.

"Hallo, Kate! What in thunder are you doing here?" was the greeting of Will Atlee, when he recognized his sister.

"Tell me, rather, what *you* are doing here," replied Kate, when she had recovered her speech. "In the name of that God to whom you must answer for this night's work, what have you done?"

"Nothing much," replied Will, with a forced laugh. "We have got ourselves into a mighty bad scrape, and that's about all. I don't know how we are going to get out of it. Buck Turl has been shot out of it, Sim Trotter has run out of it, and the old man and I are left in it."

"Whose body is that in the chimney? Answer me truly, Will!"

"That is only an Injun who tried to sneak in among us."

"Have you killed no one, then—none of Jacob Ryeburn's family?"

"Nobody but that red-skin."

"Thank God!"

"What is that girl so mighty thankful about? What is she doing here, anyhow?" asked Simon Atlee, who had been so astounded at Kate's appearance that he had neglected to blow his fire. "It seems to me, Kate, that you care more about Jake Ryeburn's folks than you care about your own kin."

"I might better say that to you, father, for you have come here to harry and murder Jacob Ryeburn's family, and have left your own kin to be killed and scalped by the Indians."

"What Indians?" exclaimed the old man.

"It is only through God's great mercy, father, that one of your family has lived through the past horrible night."

"What do you mean, girl?"

"I mean that your own house was attacked by the Indians, a short time after you went on your wicked errand. They killed old Nero, and would have killed me and Martha and Benny, if we had not been in the garret. We drew up the ladder, and we escaped by climbing out of the window, while they were getting drunk on your ruin."

"But what become of you then?"

"We wandered away through the darkness, in the woods and on the river, untill we were captured by two Indians, after I had been shot in the arm. We would have been with them yet, if we had not been rescued by George Ryeburn and Walter Wilson."

"George Ryeburn and Walter Wilson! Have they come back?"

"They have."

"What's that you say, girl?" called Jacob Ryeburn, from above. "Has my boy got back?"

"Yes, sir. He is safe and well," replied Kate.

"When did he get back?"

"Last night."

"Where is he now?"

"I left him taking care of Martha Garnet and my little brother. Walter Wilson is down here. He has been fighting the Indians around the house."

"I told you so, Simon Atlee," said Mr. Ryeburn. "I told you that we would have help before long. Do your worst, you murdering rascal! You are only piling up trouble for yourself!"

"Kate, you must get away from here," said Simon Atlee. "You mustn't follow me about, and interfere with what I think it right to do. I won't have you coming down here and lecturing me in this style. Mind me, now, and go away, for this is no place for you."

"It is no place for *you*, father, as you well know, and you are *not* doing what you think is right. I do not mean to lecture you, but I have come to warn you of your danger, and to draw you out of it, if I can. You have done no murder

yet, though I am afraid you have tried to, and it is not too late to repent and go home. Quit this horrid work, I beg you, for the sake of your children, if not for your own sake. The Indians who were at our house have alarmed the neighborhood, and the people will be sure to come here when they turn out. Walter Wilson is here now, and more will come before long. You had better escape while you can, for it would be a terrible thing to be caught in such business."

"And that is not all, Simon Atlee," said Mr. Ryeburn. "Some one whom you would never suspect of it has gone from here to the fort, and it can't be long before Captain Hood and his men are down here. Then you will be caught, like a rat in a trap."

"I think, old man, that Kate speaks the truth," said Will Atlee, though he still kept watch on the trap-door with leveled rifle. "We haven't done any thing yet that can't be mended, and, for my part, I am in favor of getting out of the scrape while I can. Come, old man; let us quit this and be going."

"Not I," angrily replied Simon Atlee. "When I start to do a thing, I don't intend to be preached out of it by a silly girl, or to be scared out of it by that old scoundrel up there. As I have gone so far, I may as well finish the job, and I mean to do it."

The old man then commenced to blow his fire vigorously, and a bright blaze started up from the floor.

"Father, do you really mean to set this house on fire?" asked Kate. "Think of what you are doing!"

"That is just what I do mean, girl, and I know what I am doing. You had better stand out of the way."

Kate rushed forward, and quickly scattered the burning brands with her foot.

The old man started up with an oath, pushed her rudely from him, and would have struck her, if his son had not caught his arm.

"What are you about old man?" exclaimed Will. "If you hurt Kate, you will get into trouble with me."

"She must quit interfering with me, then. I am bound to start this fire, and nothing shall hinder me."

"Don't try it again, I beg you, father!" implored Kate.

"You are only bringing yourself into difficulty. There has been wrong and trouble enough. Don't let him do it, Will!"

The voice of Jacob Ryeburn was heard above, in altercation with his wife.

"Let me go, Mary! Let me go, I say! I mean to have one shot at the black-hearted villain, and I will have it!"

"I believe you are getting crazy, father," said Will Atlee. "You had better do as Kate tells you, and let this matter drop. Sim Trotter has gone, and I mean to follow him."

"Run away, then, if you want to, like that white-livered hound! I don't want any cowards about me."

"You may call me what you please, but I intend to go before I get caught, and you had better do the same. They won't hurt Kate, and I mean to look out for myself."

Without another word, the young man slipped out through the hole in the chimney, and was gone. His father again scraped together the brands of fire and began to blow them. Kate stood and looked at him, irresolute, her countenance expressive of intense anguish.

The next moment a shot was heard, near the house.

"They have killed my boy, curse them!" wildly exclaimed Simon Atlee.

"Yes, and this will settle you, you murdering villain!" shouted Jacob Ryeburn, as he fired through the trap-door.

At the report of Mr. Ryeburn's rifle, Kate fell heavily on the floor.

Her father rushed to her, and called her by name, but she was insensible, and a spot of blood on her forehead showed where the bullet had struck.

"Curses light on you forever, Jake Ryeburn!" screamed the old man. "You have shot my girl, and now you and your whole brood shall burn!"

Running about as if he was frantic, he picked up every combustible article that he could find, and piled it on the fire which he had kindled in the corner. The blaze started up, brighter than ever.

It was none too soon for his purpose, as the sound of voices and footsteps could be heard without, approaching the house.

Starting up, he ran to the front door, and opened it. The

air that was thus permitted to enter kindled the bright blaze into a strong flame. Casting a frenzied glance at the inanimate body of Kate, he uttered a yell, and ran out of the house.

"He is gone; Jacob," said Mrs. Ryeburn. "You and Tom had better go down and put out that fire."

"I wonder if I have killed that girl," replied her husband. "I should hate to look at her, if I have; but the fire must be put out."

"Let me go, mars'r, and you stay here," said Tom. "P'raps she ain't dead, arter all."

The negro jumped down into the lower room, and lifted the pulseless hands of Kate Atlee.

"Is she dead, Tom?" asked Mr. Ryeburn.

"Stone dead, mars'r Jake—shot through the forehead."

The old man groaned heavily, and stepped back to the window.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOME ACCOUNTS SETTLED.

SIM TROTTER, in great surprise, looked after Kate Atlee for a moment, as she sped toward the house, and then commenced to run again.

As he turned, he was suddenly confronted by Walter Wilson, whom the sound of voices had caused to hasten back from his "little scout."

"Stop!" ordered Wilson, in a peremptory tone. "I am going to have a talk with you, my fine fellow."

"What do you want to stop me for?" sulkily asked Trotter. "I ain't an Injun, though I am dressed up and painted like one."

"I know that you are not a red-skin, though you have made yourself look like one. You only did it to have a little sport, I suppose."

"Whatever I did it for, it is none of your business."

"I am not making it my business. I have heard that there

are some white men who have the hearts of red-skins. If there are any such, their hearts ought to be cut out. Don't you think so?"

"P'raps I do, and p'raps I don't. I do think that I don't mean to stay here and be bothered with you. Are you a crazy man?"

"I believe I am pretty near crazy on one subject; but I have not come to that point yet. What became of the young woman who just left you?"

"She went into that house yonder."

"Do you know who she is?"

"She is Simon Atlee's darter, I reckon."

"Are her father and brother in that house?"

"I reckon they are."

"Has any murder been done in that house during the past night? Has any one been killed there, I mean?"

"Yes; Buck Turl was shot, and Will Atlee killed an Injun."

"Is that all?"

"That's all, stranger."

"You have one sin less upon your soul, then, than I supposed you had."

Sim Trotter, whom Wilson had held by the power of his eye and his commanding manner, had answered his questions so far, mechanically and as a matter of course; but he soon reflected that he was the larger man, if not the stronger of the two, and he became rebellious, indignant that he had suffered himself to be so easily delayed while making his escape.

"That's all you are goin' to git out of me, stranger," said he. "I have told you more'n you had a right to know, already."

"I am much obliged to you, and I will tell you something in my turn," replied Wilson, with a strange smile.

"I don't want to hear nothin' more from you. It's gittin' late, and I must be movin' away from here."

"It is getting early, you should say—the hour when owls and bats and other night-birds seek their nests. You must not go yet."

"Who is goin' to hender me?"

"I am. I am not done with you yet."

"But I am done with *you*. Git out of my way!"

Trotter attempted to push the young man from his path, but Wilson seized him with a grip of iron, threw him on the ground, then roughly raised him to a sitting posture, and seated himself in front of him.

"Are you going to stay there now, or shall I tie you?" asked Wilson, with a threatening look.

"'Pears like you have broke every bone in my body," grumbled Trotter.

"If you attempt to get away, I will break your legs, so that you can't move."

"What do you want, stranger? Hurry up with it, now do, please," humbly implored Trotter.

"I want to tell you a little story."

"But I don't want to hear any story."

"You must listen to it. Perhaps it will make you feel better. You don't appear to be in good humor, this morning."

"Tell it quick, then."

"I will tell it quick enough to please you. Once on a time—not many years ago—a young man came to this country to settle. He was a good-hearted and well-meaning young man, who had seen a great deal of the rough side of the world. He had lived hard, worked hard, and fought hard, but at last he was going to settle down and enjoy life in peace and quiet. He had the one thing, above all others, that will give a man happiness in this world—a young and lovely wife. She was very beautiful, but it wasn't her beauty that he valued most; it was her goodness; for she was like an angel sent down to live a while on earth.

"Only a little while. The poor fellow's happiness was not suffered to last. He was obliged to go away from his home, and he left his wife there, with a negro man and woman. While he was absent, a party of Indians attacked his house at night, and burned it to the ground, after they had cruelly murdered all who were within it. When he returned, he found nothing but smoking ruins and dead bodies."

"That was a hard case, but I don't see why you want to tell me about it," muttered Trotter.

"The young man swore that he would be revenged on those

Indians and on the whole race of Indians. There was a white man among them, and he swore that he would be revenged on him, too."

Trotter shuddered, and his paleness was visible through his paint.

"He could not find out who that white man was, and he gave up the search for him in despair. But the last red-skin of that party, just before he was killed, made a confession to him concerning that white man, and told a tale about him that would make satan shiver in the hottest corner of his dominions. That white man's name was Sim Trotter, and the name of the man whose wife was murdered was the same as mine. I am Walter Wilson!"

With a yell of horror and despair, the culprit sprung to his feet, and attempted to escape; but Wilson leaped upon him like a tiger, and bore him to the ground, clutching his throat with the frenzied grasp of both his hands.

Trotter in vain endeavored to resist. He might as well have tried to open the jaws of a tiger after they were fastened in his flesh, as to remove those tenacious fingers that were strangling his life out. After a few struggles, his eyes rolled back, and he was still, and Wilson slowly arose.

"Such is the end of the last and the worst, Lilian!" he exclaimed, looking wildly up at the sky. "I have finished what I swore to do. Shall I tear out the heart of the worthless dog?"

He handled his knife, and looked at the body as if he was about to perform some further act of vengeance upon it, when he was recalled to his senses by the crack of two rifles and the whiz of two bullets, that buried themselves in the tree behind him.

Instantly he seized his rifle, and jumped behind the tree, from which he looked out for his enemies; but they had also taken cover, and he supposed that he was about to be subjected to the same mode of attack that had nearly proved successful when it was adopted by two Indians a little while before.

As he anxiously watched every tree within the range of his vision, his ears were greeted by the trampling of horses, and directly several rifle-shots rung through the forest. One

of the Indians fell dead, and the other bounded out from his cover, to be laid low by Wilson's rifle.

Wilson immediately found himself surrounded by friends, the young farmers of the neighborhood, with Captain Hood at their head, and Alice Ryeburn on horseback among them.

Hurried questions and explanations ensued, and then Captain Hood and his party proceeded to attend to the business that had brought them there. They first examined the bodies of the slain.

"You were right, Alice," said Captain Hood. "These are not white men, but Indians."

"What did she suppose they were?" asked Wilson.

"Her father believed that his house was attacked by Simon Atlee and some other men disguised as Indians, but she thought differently, because she met two unmistakable Indians as she was going to the fort."

"Her father was not mistaken. These are red-skins, to be sure, and they are not the first that I have seen since yesterday; but the house was attacked by the Atlees and two other men, one of whom I have just settled. While they were down here, their own house was entered by Indians, and the negro man was killed, but Kate and Martha Garnet escaped with the boy and are safe."

"Where are the Atlees now?" asked Captain Hood. "The house seems to be quiet and in the usual condition."

"They are in the house, I believe, but I think they will do no more harm, for Kate came down with me, and she has gone in to them."

"No harm!" exclaimed Alice. "Who knows how many have been murdered?"

"None of your people have been murdered, Miss Alice. They are all safe."

"All safe! Does that look like safety? See, the house is on fire!"

In fact, at that moment flames and smoke began to burst out of the side of the house, and a negro woman could be seen at the upper window, beckoning to the rescuers.

"Gentlemen, half a dozen of you must scour the woods and hunt out the red-skins," said Captain Hood. "Come, Wilson, let us go to the house."

As they hastened toward the house, together with several of Captain Hood's followers, a man disguised as an Indian ran out at the front door, and was instantly shot by one of the riflemen. An examination of the body showed that it was Simon Atlee who had thus met the reward of his evil deeds.

Hood and Wilson rushed into the house, where the fire was burning briskly, but found the lower floor empty, with the exception of Kate Atlee, who was still lying insensible on the boards, with the flames almost touching her. The negro had become frightened, and had gone back into the garret.

"Is it possible that the scoundrel has killed his daughter?" exclaimed Captain Hood.

"I am afraid he has," replied Wilson. "If you will put out the fire, captain, I will attend to the girl."

The flames were easily extinguished, as the oak logs had not yet fairly caught, and then Captain Hood and one of his men swung themselves up into the garret, where they found the family bending over the body of Jacob Ryeburn, who was lying dead on the floor, near the window, with blood oozing from a hole in his head.

The same bullet which had slain Simon Atlee, after passing through his breast, had ranged upward and struck his old enemy in the forehead, thus fulfilling a prediction that Atlee had made many years before, to the effect that if Ryeburn did not die first, they would perish at the same time.

Leaving his companion to take care of the body of the old man and of his weeping wife, Captain Hood went to break the sad news to Alice Ryeburn.

When Wilson carried Kate Atlee out into the air, he discovered, to his great joy, that she was not dead, but had been stunned by the bullet, which had glanced off from her forehead. He immediately took measures to restore her to life, and to a knowledge of the terrible events that had recently occurred.

CHAPTER XIV.

WILL ATLEE'S ESCAPE.—CONCLUSION.

GEORGE RYEBURN and Martha Garnet waited a long time, as it seemed to them, where they had been left by their companions, hoping to receive some intelligence concerning the scenes that were supposed to be transpiring at Jacob Ryeburn's house.

George had removed the bodies of the Indians who had been slain by himself and Wilson, and he became quite restless and uneasy as he waited there. He was anxious to go to his father's house and learn what had really happened, and his anxiety increased after Kate had slipped away and gone to the scene of danger; but he could not bring himself to leave the helpless beings who were under his protection. He remained with them, therefore, but could not help showing the trouble that oppressed him.

"You are very uneasy, George, and I know what is the matter with you," said Martha. "You think you ought to be at home, because your family needs you there, and Kate may be in danger. I think so, too, and I will not hinder you. Do not mind us, but go. I trust there is no more danger now, and we can take care of ourselves."

"I could not think of such a thing," replied Ryeburn. "I can not leave you here without protection, for there must be more Indians in the woods."

"We will not fear them. Your duty calls you to your home, and you must go, George."

"I will tell you what I will do. It is now daylight, and we can easily go where we please. I will take you to your house, and then, if I hear nothing from Wilson, or others, I must go and see for myself."

Martha arose and took Benny by the hand, and sorrowfully followed the young man.

They had gone but a little way, when they heard a rushing and trampling in the forest, and directly they saw, a short

distance at the right of their course, Will Atlee running toward them at the top of his speed. He had lost his feathers and paint in swimming the river, and he was closely pursued by a tall savage, who was gaining on him rapidly.

Martha Garnet, with a scream, rushed toward the fugitive, and George Ryeburn drew up his gun, just as young Atlee stumbled and fell, and the Indian fell upon him, brandishing a knife, which he was prepared to plunge into the heart of the fallen man.

Before the knife could descend, Martha Garnet dealt the savage a blow on the head with her tomahawk that cleft his skull, and Will sprung to his feet, surprised to see how and by whom he had been rescued.

"Did you do that?" he asked, looking at the girl, who stood paralyzed by the sight of her deed. "Are you here, George Ryeburn?"

"Yes, Will Atlee, I am here, taking care of your brother and cousin, who have been nearly murdered by the Indians. Did you come from my father's house?"

"Yes," stammered the young man.

"I know what you went there for. I know all about it. Tell me whether my father has been hurt, or any of the family."

"None of them had been hurt when I left there, and I reckon they are all safe. Look here, George Ryeburn; you may just take your rifle and shoot me down. I haven't done much harm, I believe, but I meant to, and you have a right to shoot me. Neither I nor anybody else can object to it, because I deserve it. I am ready."

"I am not in the humor for shooting you, though you have attempted a great wrong," replied Ryeburn. "There has been enough blood spilt since last evening. You had better go home now, with your cousin, and I advise you to stay quiet for a while, as some others may not be willing to let you alone. It was a great mercy that your own family were not murdered by the Indians, when you were trying to murder mine."

"Thank you; I will go," answered the humbled young man. "Come, Martha."

"Is uncle Simon alive, Will?" asked Martha.

"I reckon so. He was when I saw him last. I ran away from there, but he wouldn't try it."

"Did you see Kate?"

"Yes; I left her there, trying to coax the old man away."

"I must hurry home," said George. "Take good care of your cousin and the little one, Will Atlee, and perhaps this trouble may all be settled."

When George Ryeburn reached his home, the first object that attracted his attention was Kate Atlee, to whom Wilson, having succeeded in restoring her, was relating what had happened since she was struck down.

As she came forward to meet her lover, they both found cause for grief, for the bodies of Simon Atlee and Jacob Ryeburn were laid upon the grass together, and the mother and sister of George were mourning over the remains of their husband and father.

Kate was scowled upon at first, but George briefly explained what her own trouble had been, and she was permitted to mingle her tears with those of the mother and sister of her lover.

When Mrs. Ryeburn perceived who she was, she shuddered and drew back, as if she would avoid contact with her.

"*She* did not do it, mother," whispered Alice, as she put her arm around Kate's neck. "She has suffered as much as we have, for she narrowly escaped being murdered, with her cousin and her little brother, while her people were here."

Mrs. Ryeburn was melted, and folded Kate in her arms, as a fellow-sufferer and mourner.

"It is too late to wish that this might have been avoided," said Kate, as she gazed at the two bodies. "We can only pray that their quarrels and hatreds may be buried with them, and may no more be heard of."

"Amen!" responded Mrs. Ryeburn and Alice, most heartily, and thereafter they had reason to know that their prayers had been heard and answered.

The funeral of Jacob Ryeburn took place on the Sabbath after his death, and was largely attended. On the same day Simon Atlee was quietly laid in a grave near his house, with no mourners but his own family. Their quarrel was ended, and their life-long feud was "buried with their bones."

The bodies of Buck Turl and Sim Trotter were interred in a nameless grave, over which no one would have placed any epitaph but "good riddance."

It was discovered that the Indians who had been about the settlement were a marauding party from a band that had lately crossed the Ohio, and that all who had not been killed by the settlers had made their escape to the main body. The people of that neighborhood were not again troubled during the season, except by the necessity of sending assistance to their friends further down the river.

Captain Hood desired to bring Will Atlee to punishment, as one of the principals in the attack on Jacob Ryeburn's house; but George Ryeburn persuaded him to let him go, in the hope that his repentance and reform were genuine and permanent, and Will remained in partial seclusion until the affair had "blown over."

He had, indeed, been greatly changed by the events of the dark night. He entirely abandoned his former associates, never left his home except on business, and conducted himself, in all respects, as a peaceable, honest and industrious citizen. Kate became proud of him, and her lover encouraged and assisted him by all the means in his power.

George Ryeburn repaired his mother's house, and obliterated all traces of the dark night's work. He remained with her, and worked with her, until the next year, when he married Kate Atlee, and brought her home to take the place of his sister, who had been carried off to the fort by Captain Hood; for the captain, after her father's death, was more enthusiastic than ever in his admiration of Alice, declaring that there was not a braver and better girl in the country, and did not cease to importune her until she consented to marry him a little before the time that had been agreed upon.

Will Atlee was deeply grateful to his cousin for his rescue from the knife of the Indian, and his residence at home soon made him recognize her many good and amiable qualities. He asked her to remain and take care of the farm with him as his wife, and she readily consented to do so.

THE END.

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